Marianas Beach Resort holds Christmas tree lighting ceremony. PAGE 2
Ex-CNMI bar executive who pled guilty to fraud sentenced to 18 months in jail. PAGE 4

Hafa Adai!

8 DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Saipan Tribune

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THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

Volume XXXIV, Issue No. 251

www.saipantribune.com TUESDAY DECEMBER 17, 2024 www.facebook.com/saipantribune

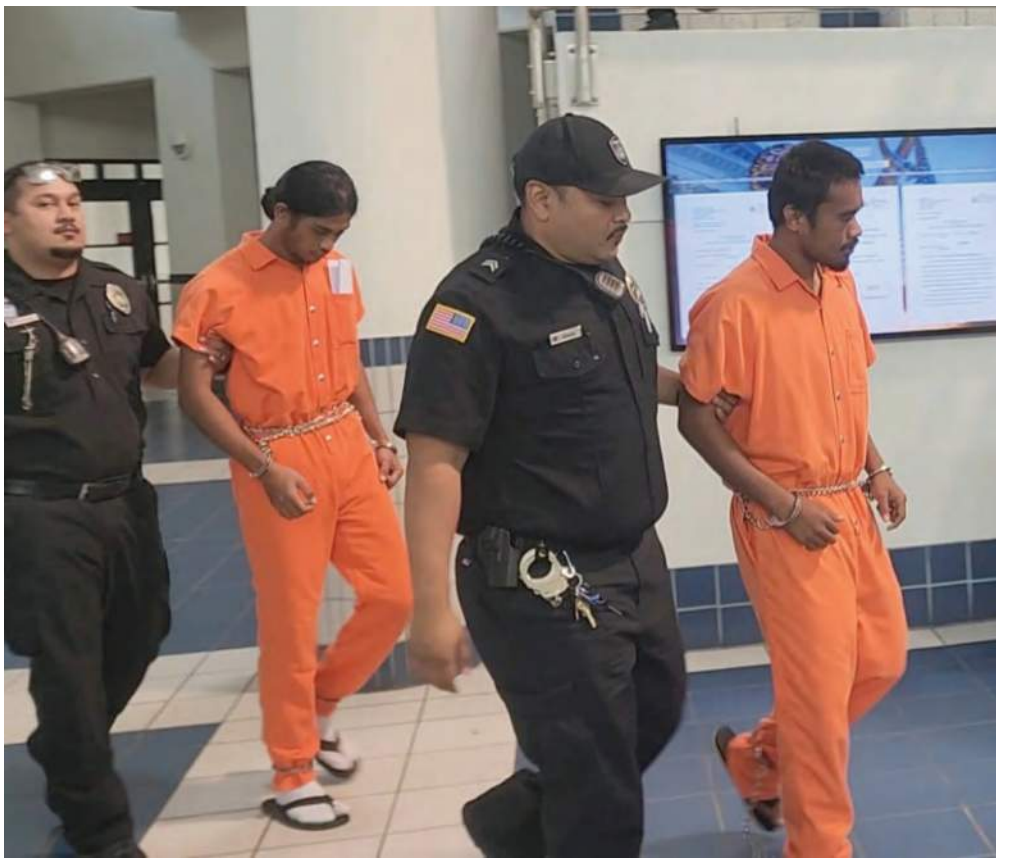
Taxi robbery suspects charged in court

By CHRYSTAL MARINO
chrystal_marino@saipantribune.com
CORRESPONDENT

All five suspects allegedly involved in the case of assault and robbery of a taxi driver appeared before the NMI Superior Court in Susupe yesterday morning for a bail hearing.

According to an earlier release of arrest warrants, a $50,000 cash bail had been placed on each of the young men. During their bail hearing yesterday, the amount was maintained for the two adult suspects, but due to the three minors' hearing being a sealed matter, media are not sure

See TAXI on Page 4



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Jay Billy, second from the left, and JR Tipingeni, also known as Awatan, are escorted to their bail hearing yesterday at the NMI Superior Court in Susupe.

Pedestrian succumbs from hit-and-run accident

By CHRYSTAL MARINO
chrystal_marino@saipantribune.com
CORRESPONDENT

KIMBERLY ESMORES

A file photo of one of the planes of Star Marianas Air, Inc.

A Sunday night outing turned tragic when a pedestrian lost his life in a fatal hit-and-run accident along Tun Thomas P. Sablan Road near Pak Pak Beach in San Antonio.

Officers from the Department of Public Safety responded to the scene around 11:20pm on Dec. 15, 2024, following a report of an auto-pedestrian accident. Upon arrival, they discovered an unresponsive male lying along the roadway. The man, who sustained serious injuries, showed no signs of life.

Preliminary findings from the DPS Highway Patrol Division indicate that the indi-

See PEDESTRIAN on Page 4

Star Marianas seeks CNMI leaders' help in overturning CPA's eviction notice

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The battle for Star Marianas Air, Inc. to keep their Tinian hangar continues with Star Marianas reaching out to CNMI leaders for their help.

KIMBERLY ESMORES

A file photo of one of the planes of Star Marianas Air, Inc.

Previously, the Commonwealth Ports Authority issued a letter informing Star Marianas Air of its decision to deny its request for an extension on their Tinian Hangar lease pursuant to over $1 million in unpaid fees. In addition, CPA has notified Star Marianas Air that it has 30-days to vacate the premises.

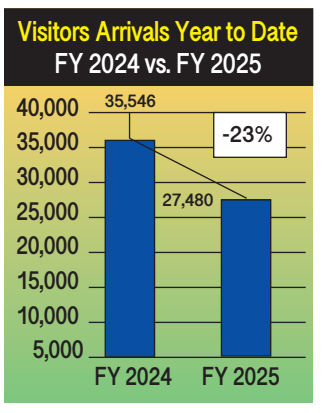
Star Marianas Air president Shaun Christian has since written to Gov. Arnold I. Palacios, Tinian Mayor Edwin Aldan, and Rota Mayor Aubry M. Hocog seeking their help with the matter.

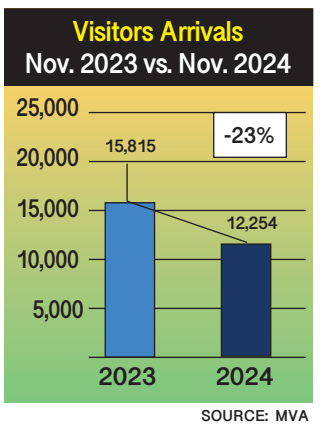
See STAR on Page 4

Visitor arrivals down 23% in November

According to monthly statistics from the Marianas Visitors Authority, arrivals to the islands of Saipan, Tinian and Rota decreased 23% to 12,254 visitors in November 2024, compared to 15,815 visitors received in November 2023.

In November, visitor arrivals from South Korea registered 8,868, 32% lower than 13,026 visitors received in November 2023. The Marianas received 60 flights from Korea this November compared to 90 flights last year. The suspension of Asiana Airlines operations to Saipan since July and the suspension of Jeju Air's night flight from Seoul beginning Oct. 28 negatively affected arrivals. However, arrivals are anticipated to receive a boost





SOURCE: MVA

See VISITOR on Page 4

INSIDE

LOCAL
The University of Guam conferred degrees on Sunday to 217 graduates at its Fanuchånan 2024 Commencement Ceremony in the Calvo Field House.

Page 9

WORLD
At Damascus' international airport, the new head of security—one of the rebels who marched across Syria to the capital—arrived with his team.

Page 10

LIFE & STYLE
The Spider-Man spinoff "Kraven the Hunter" got off to a disastrous start in North American theaters this weekend, earning only $11 million, according to studio estimates Sunday.

Page 11

SCAN ME WITH A COMPATIBLE QR READER TO KEEP UPDATED ON ALL THE LATEST NEWS.

GOT A NEWS TIP? TEL: 235-6397 / 235-2440 FAX: 235-3740 EMAIL: editor@saipantribune.com

Local

Marianas Beach Resort holds Christmas tree lighting ceremony

By RACQUEL H. FLOYD
raxfloyd@gmail.com
CORRESPONDENT

RACQUEL FLOYD

Marianas Beach Resort held a Christmas tree lighting ceremony with the Marianas High School Glee Club performing Christmas songs last Friday night.

"I'm here to say let there be light," as owner David Hood of Marianas Beach Resort held a Christmas tree lighting ceremony last Friday night.

According to general manager Gloria Cavanaugh, the tradition of holiday lighting—started by Hyatt Regency Saipan—was continued despite being slightly delayed.

"We believe that you know how all things, there's a certain tradition that should be followed and one of them that has been in the Hyatt family has been the lighting of the Christmas tree, even though we are little bit late, we actually wanted to make sure that we actually do that this year," she said.

Hood acknowledged the staff for their hard work. "I want to take a minute to thank the staff here who have worked so hard over the last few months, getting this all, ready for everybody, and the general public is happy to be here to see this. Thank you everybody."

He said in an interview that the hotel's advertising led to bookings and positive results after their soft opening three weeks ago.

"We planned a soft opening because we wanted to get organized. And then, what we've done is increased advertising and get the word out that we are open and as you can see, tonight is starting to pay off, and people are booking rooms here now, and we've got some really good specials for locals, this is an exciting time," said Hood.

He also predicted that the official agreement to use the brand name 'Sheraton' will be signed in January.

"It could be sooner than later. We have our final agreement draft. So, it's kind of up to us. I'm predicting that we'll sign an agreement in January. There will be a few things we need to do, but we'll be able to announce that it is a Sheraton, but right now we can't do that," added Hood.

The businessman also mentioned that using the name "Hyatt" is currently part of the marketing strategy to aid recognition.

"Right now, we are doing that just to make sure people understand where we are because there's a new name and what does that mean? And so, we mention the Hyatt, only because people understand what that is and we're trying not to be confusing because now we're going to change from what it is now to Sheraton, so it's a little confusing to the community but it's just the way it has to be."

Meanwhile, Cavanaugh, in an interview, said that the name Marianas Beach Resort was chosen during a transitional period before a franchise agreement is signed. The name was selected after she saw a Marianas Visitors Authority pamphlet.

"We had to have a name in between this whole transition because we can't be a Sheraton until the franchise agreement is signed and we have to do certain things like a few renovations, having the IT and everything. And we were just sitting at the table and in front of me was something from MVA and it said the Marianas and I go 'hey, why don't we name it, the Marianas?' That way MVA could advertise for us. We had Mariana Resort & Spa which actually brought me here. It's kind of a very bittersweet thing for me to have David agree to name it the Marianas Beach Resort. Hopefully, that name and that feeling will hit people in the heart, and that they will come and see what's really happening here," said Cavanaugh.

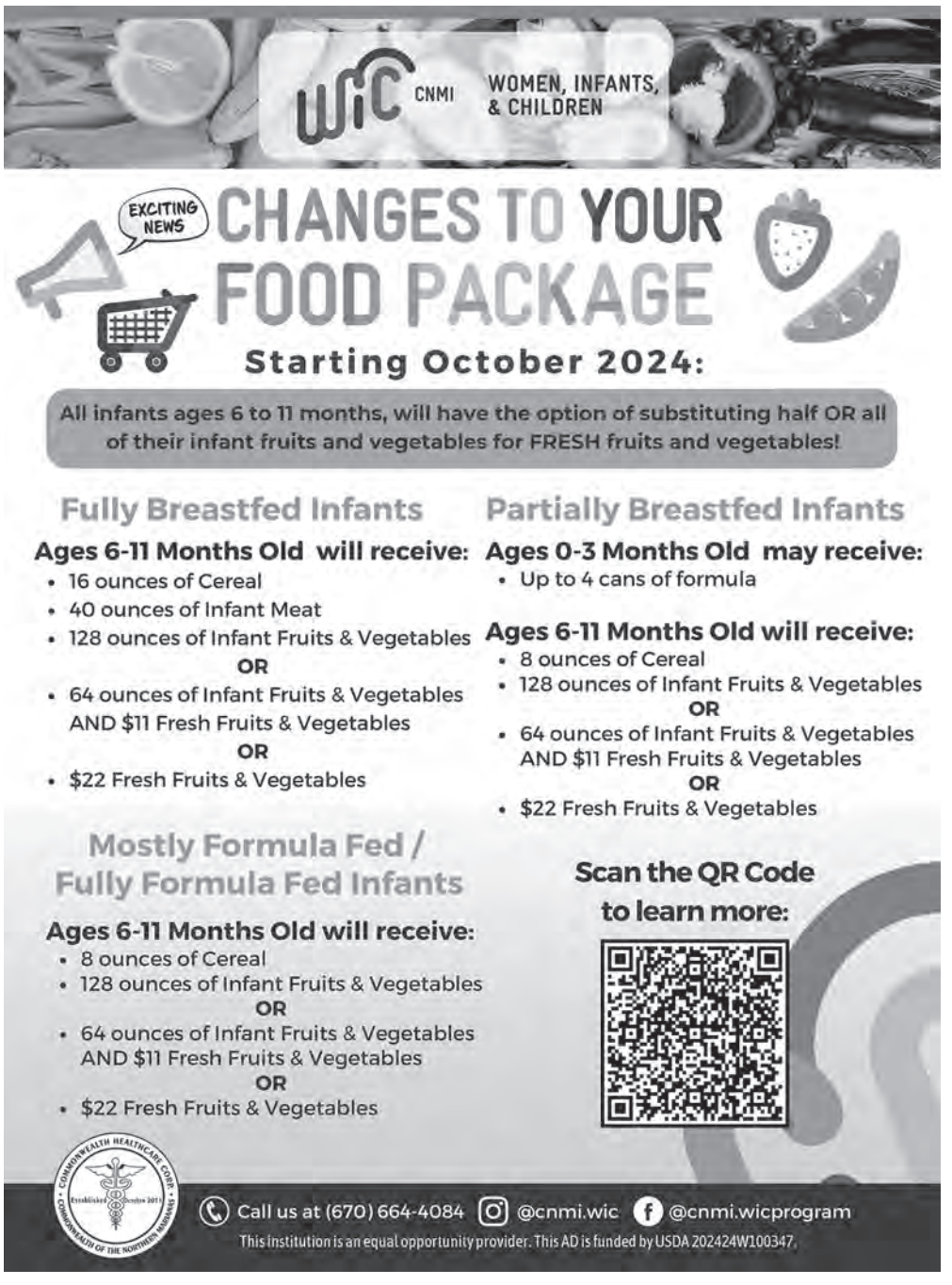
The night also launched Miyako's dinner and the opening of Skipper's Bar and Cavanaugh said that the names of the restaurants and bar at Hyatt remain.

"We decide just to keep all of that, it's not necessarily a name that was branded for Hyatt, but the signs are up already, and people relate to it. Skipper's right now, the first night that we open, and a lot of people are just very happy."

Cavanaugh added that they also launched their website and received their first reservations from booking.com.

"It's very challenging because nobody knows Marianas Beach Resort and it's just kind of an interim name and that's why we say former 'Hyatt' because then people were like OK I know where you are now but hey we got our first booking.com reservations today."

The Marianas High School Glee Club was acknowledged by Hood as the group sang Christmas carols during the Christmas tree lighting ceremony with "Hark the Herald" as their first song.


WIC CNMI
WOMEN, INFANTS, & CHILDREN
EXCITING NEWS
CHANGES TO YOUR FOOD PACKAGE
Starting October 2024:
All infants ages 6 to 11 months, will have the option of substituting half OR all of their infant fruits and vegetables for FRESH fruits and vegetables!
Fully Breastfed Infants
Ages 6-11 Months Old will receive:
• 16 ounces of Cereal
• 40 ounces of Infant Meat
• 128 ounces of Infant Fruits & Vegetables
OR
• 64 ounces of Infant Fruits & Vegetables AND $11 Fresh Fruits & Vegetables
OR
• $22 Fresh Fruits & Vegetables
Partially Breastfed Infants
Ages 0-3 Months Old may receive:
• Up to 4 cans of formula
Ages 6-11 Months Old will receive:
• 8 ounces of Cereal
• 128 ounces of Infant Fruits & Vegetables
OR
• 64 ounces of Infant Fruits & Vegetables AND $11 Fresh Fruits & Vegetables
OR
• $22 Fresh Fruits & Vegetables
Mostly Formula Fed / Fully Formula Fed Infants
Ages 6-11 Months Old will receive:
• 8 ounces of Cereal
• 128 ounces of Infant Fruits & Vegetables
OR
• 64 ounces of Infant Fruits & Vegetables AND $11 Fresh Fruits & Vegetables
OR
• $22 Fresh Fruits & Vegetables
Scan the QR Code to learn more:
Call us at (670) 664-4084 @cnmi.wic @cnmi.wicprogram
This institution is an equal opportunity provider. This AD is funded by USDA 202424W100347.

KAFPA Inc.'s Farmers Market to be re-ignited at Garapan Fishing Base

The Department of Lands and Natural Resources and the Kagman Agricultural Farms and Producers Association, Inc. came together and signed a memorandum of understanding to allow for a Farmers Market, organized by KAFPA Inc., to convene every Saturday from 6am to 2pm at the Garapan Fishing Base.

Pursuant to the signed MOU, the following terms apply: 1. The term of the MOU shall be effective for two years and shall continue in force unless 15 days written notice is issued by either party to dissolve MOU; 2. the DLNR shall permit Lot No. 013 D 53 for the purpose of the Sabalu Farmers Market; 3. The Sabalu Market shall be open every Saturday from 6am to 2pm, except for those activities authorized by DLNR, i.e. Agricultural Fair, Red Cross Walk-a-thon, and so forth; inclusive of other terms.

The Saturday Farmer's Market, commonly referred to as the "Sabalu Farmers Market," is an event that brings together local farmers in an effort to display their passion and talents for agricultural production, as well as provide a form of sustenance to the community.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

From left, Parks and Recreation director Mike Cruz, Department of Land and Natural Resources Secretary Sylvan O. Igisomar, KAFPA Inc. president Glenn Manglona, DLNR special advisor Cameron S. Nicholas, and KAFPA Inc. treasurer Jesus M. Castro pose excitedly with a signed MOU to allow for the Farmers Market to commence every Saturday at the Garapan Fishing Base.

On Oct. 24, 2024, the KAFPA Inc., headed by Glenn Manglona as president, JM Guerrero as the Sabalu Farmers Market chairman, and other dedicated officers, met with the DLNR Secretary Sylvan O. Igisomar and the staff to explain KAFPA Inc.'s intent to re-establish the Sabalu Farmers Market at DLNR's designated property at the Garapan Fishing Base and KAFPA Inc.'s need to adopt rules and regulations governing the Sabalu Farmers Market. With the adoption of their rules and regulation, the KAFPA Inc. was ready to proceed with said market.

Prior to its official launch, an MOU must be executed between DLNR and the KAFPA Inc. in order to officially permit such activities to undergo and on Dec, 13, 2024, Igisomar and his staff met with the heads of the KAFPA Inc. to discuss and finalize terms of the MOU. Soon after finalizing the terms, the MOU was signed by the appropriate heads of both parties. The signing of such an MOU is a clear indication of better and

See KAFPA on Page 4

Love from Above 2024 — Operation Christmas Drop

A shot of Operation Christmas Drop parachutes from ground. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Santa preparing for the drop. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Had you been walking the shoreline of one of Micronesia's scenic Outer Islands during the week of Dec. 8, you may have noticed a low-flying C130 cargo plane circling the island. Were you lucky enough to have a pair of binoculars, you may have been able to spot the pilot of that Air Force C130 plane, smiling and donning a Santa hat.

Suddenly, from the open-ended back of the plane, large boxes would drop and parachutes pop open, guiding festively decorated crates filled with gifts gently down onto the glimmering blue surface of the island lagoon.

The plane would then tip one wing down toward the island, perhaps to allow the crew to check that the cargo had been successfully sent on its way . . . or perhaps as a nod of goodbye and "Merry Christmas."

No doubt, you would see excited islanders waving to the departing plane, then jumping into small boats, heading out to secure the boxes and drag them ashore where villagers of all ages waited in anticipation of what treasures the boxes hold this year . . .

You have just witnessed a tradition that has been happening every Christmas season since 1952—Operation Christmas Drop, a humanitarian airlift and holiday tradition which is made possible by the U.S. Air Force. Wikipedia states that it is the longest running humanitarian airlift in the world.

Individuals, churches, and organizations throughout the Pacific region contribute generously to the operation on an annual basis. "This is a great opportunity to join with other Christian Churches and charitable organizations in helping those throughout Micronesia who simply need some love and support," said Brett Child, who directs the humanitarian efforts in Micronesia for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Specifically, this year the Church's humanitarian department contributed rice, casting nets, fishhooks, flip-flops, and first-aid kits to the Operation Christmas Drop effort.

Volunteers for Operation Christmas Drop do some artwork to Operation Christmas Drop packages. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

A snowman with snorkel painting in one of the Operation Christmas Drop packages. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Others made personal contributions, such as paying for and sponsoring the individual gift boxes. Senior Latter-day Saint missionaries donated several bags of new toys to make sure boxes contained plenty of toys for the kids. "No child should be without a new toy for Christmas," said Paul Havig, a communications specialist for his church.

On the Saturday before the planes take off, officially for a "training mission," contributors who have helped fill the boxes gather in a hanger on Andersen Air Force Base to decorate the boxes before shipment. Using paint and markers, well-wishers of all ages paint the sides and tops of the boxes with hand drawn images of Christmas trees, manger scenes, snowmen, C130s being flown by Santa, and other bright, holiday images.

Boxes are finally inspected by young airmen who act as Santa's elves in making sure these giant Christmas packages are properly packed and prepared to be delivered Santa style through the air to their lucky island recipients.

Altogether, 60 islands received gifts from Operation Christmas Drop in 2024.

The U.S. Air Force is supported by C130 planes from America's allies South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Australia, and Canada in carrying much appreciated gifts which will bless the lives of islanders during the Christmas season and into the new year. ***(PR)***

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
CNMI GOVERNMENT

INVITATION TO BID
ITB NO.: DPW25-ITB No.: 42500019

SUBMISSION DATE: December 30, 2024 TIME: 10:00 A.M.

"Renovation for the Division of Fish & Wildlife Main Office Building."

COPIES OF THE SPECIFICATIONS MAY BE OBTAINED AT THE TECHNICAL SERVICES DIVISION, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS, LOCATED ON SECOND FLOOR, OLEAI JOETEN COMMERCIAL CENTER, SAN JOSE, SAIPAN, DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS.

THE PROVISIONS OF THE CNMI PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION 70-30.3-725 AND 70-30.3-730 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.

The project package will be available on or after **December 10, 2024** at Technical Services Division, Department of Public Works, located on Second Floor, Oleai Joeten Commercial Center, San Jose, Saipan. A non-refundable payment of **One Hundred Dollars ($100.00)** is required for each set. Payment must be made to the CNMI Teasurer and a receipt of pay-ment must be presented when obtaining the Scope of Work at the DPW Technical Services Division.

There will be a **Pre-bid Conference** for this project on December 20, 2024, 9:00 a.m., ChST at the **Division of Fish & Wildlife Building, Lower Base, Saipan.** The Prospective bidders are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the site. All question regarding this project must be submitted in writing no later than **4:30 p.m. local time on December 23, 2024** to **Mr. Anthony A. Camacho, Director of Technical Services Division,** 2nd Floor, Oleai Joeten Commercial Center, Saipan or fax to (670) 234-3547. Response to questions shall be shared with prospective bidders.

THE CNMI GOVERNMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY OR ALL BIDS, OR PORTIONS THEREOF, AND WAIVE IMMATERIAL DEFECTS IF TO DO SO WOULD BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CNMI GOVERNMENT.

/S/RAY N. YUMUL
Secretary, DPW

/S/ GERALDINE T. CRUZ
Acting Director, Division of Procurement Services

COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

INVITATION FOR BIDS
CUC-IFB-25-009

SEWER MAIN AND MANHOLE REPLACEMENT/REHAB/UPGRADE PHASE II

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed bids from qualified firms for the construction of the Sewer Main and Manhole Replacement/Rehab/Upgrade Phase II in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The project consists of realignment and replacement of the existing 4-inch bypass sewer line in **Capitol Hill Village** along **Capitol Hill Road** with a new 8-inch PVC distribution main. The scope includes the installation of appurtenances, fittings, new manholes with accessories, and the rehabilitation and reconnection of existing manholes, including the replacement of their accessories. All work must be performed in accordance with the Project Plans and Specifications, ensuring no disruption to the daily operation of the sewer system. The Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) requires the project to be completed within three hundred sixty-five (365) calendar days from the date of contract award.

The project is funded by a grant from the United States of Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). The award of this project is contingent upon receipt of approval for project award from USEPA

Prospective Bidders must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division. The Bid Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of $200.00 (non-refundable) for one IFB package set.

A Pre-Bid Conference followed by site visits will be held on **December 23, 2024, at 10:00 AM(CHST)** at the CUC Main Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room No.17, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building.

One (1) original and Five (5) hard copies of the bid MUST be submitted in a sealed envelope marked "**CUC-IFB-25-009, SEWER MAIN AND MANHOLE REPLACEMENT/REHAB/UPGRADE PHASE II**" to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) January 16, 2025**, at which time they will be publicly opened and read aloud. Bids mailed via postal or courier service must be received on or before due date and time or post-marked before due date and time.

Bid shall be submitted on the provided Bid Forms. Bidders are required to complete all Bid Forms. Bidders may supplement this form as appropriate. Bids will be required to be submitted under a condition of irrevocability for a period of 60 days after submission. **Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered.**

A *Bid Guarantee* of not less than fifteen (15%) percent of the total bid price must accompany the bids. The security deposit may be in cash, certified check, cashier's check, or bid bond executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. A Payment Bond of one hundred (100%) percent and a Performance Bond of one hundred (100%) percent of the total bid price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidder. The Payment and Performance bond must be executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands or otherwise secured in a manner satisfactory to CUC, for the protection of all persons supplying labor and material to the contractor or its subcontractors for the performance of the work provided for in the contract.

All insurers' questions, concerns and qualification shall be handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI's Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). Bidders are required to submit a clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI's Insurance Code.

Bidders are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations.

This Invitation for Bids does not commit CUC to the award of a contract or contracts, nor to pay any cost incurred in the preparation and submission of bids in anticipation of a contract. Bidders are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the bidders due to lack of information or understanding of the bid requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a bid under the contract.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from registered Proponents and must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 a.m. (CHST) on December 30, 2024** to Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Officer via email address manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copy to Joel Puyat, CUC Water/Wastewater Engineer at email joel.puyat@cucgov.org, and to Marcela Tenorio, P&S, Senior Administrative Technician at marcela.tenorio@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all bids and waive any imperfection in the bid proposal if in its sole opinion, to do so would be in the best interest of CUC. All bids shall become the property of CUC.

KEVIN O. WATSON
Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

Ex-CNMI bar executive who pled guilty to fraud sentenced to 18 months in jail

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Former CNMI Bar Association executive director Peonie Cabrera who previously pleaded guilty to all four fraud charges filed against her by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Districts of Guam and the NMI has been sentenced to 18 months in jail.

Last week, U.S. District Court for the NMI Designated Judge Frances M. Tydingco-Gatewood sentenced Cabrera to four 18-month imprisonment terms for the two counts of bank fraud and the two counts of wire fraud she pleaded guilty to earlier this year.

The four 18-month sentences will run concurrently with one another.

"The defendant is hereby committed to the custody of the Federal Bureau of Prisons to be imprisoned for a total term of 18 months as to Count I, 18 months as to Count II, 18 months as to Count III, and 18 months as to Count IV, all to run concurrently," ordered Tydingco-Gatewood.

In addition, Tydingco-Gatewood recommended that Cabrera serve her sentence in the CNMI as she is currently being treated for cancer.

"The court makes a strong judicial recommendation that defendant serve her sentence at the CNMI Department of Corrections because defendant has a team of medical professionals currently on-island treating her for cancer. Alternatively, the court strongly recommends that defendant be designated at a Bureau of Prisons medical facility that is equipped to treat defendant's medical condition and accommodate her current medical regimen, which includes receiving a CT scan every three months," said the judge.

Following her release, Cabrera will be placed on five-year supervised released for two counts of bank fraud and three-years supervised release as to two counts of wire fraud.

Like her sentence, Cabrera's supervised release will run concurrently with one another.

Lastly, Cabrera has been ordered to pay restitution to the Northern Marianas Bar Association in the amount of $249,706.18 plus a $400 assessment fee.

According to court information, for the first count of bank fraud, Cabrera falsely wrote and cashed checks payable to herself from the Bank of Hawaii account belonging to the Northern Marianas Bar Association.

"Beginning on or about April 4, 2019, and continuing to on or about May 4, 2023 in the U.S. District of the Northern Mariana Islands, Cabrera knowingly executed a scheme to obtain money, funds, and other property under the custody and control of a financial institution, by means of false and fraudulent pretenses and representations, to wit, by writing and cashing checks made payable to herself and drawn upon a bank account at the Bank of Hawaii belonging to the Northern Marianas Bar Association, knowing that she had no right to said money, funds, and property, in violation of title 18, United States Code, Section 1344(2)," said the information.

For the second count of bank fraud, Cabrera submitted a falsified signature card and then made cash withdrawals from a bank account at the Bank of Guam belonging to the Northern Marianas Bar Association.

"Beginning on or about Sept. 20, 2019, and continuing to on or about March 12, 2020, in the U.S. District of the Northern Mariana Islands, defendant Peonie Cabrera knowingly executed a scheme to obtain money, funds, and other property under the custody and control of a financial institution, by means of false and fraudulent pretenses and representations, to wit, by submitting a falsified signature card and then making cash withdrawals from a bank account at the Bank of Guam belonging to the Northern Marianas Bar Association, knowing that she had no right to said money, funds, and property, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1344(2)," the information said.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

VISITORS

From Page 4

beginning this month with the reinstatement of the Jeju's second daily flight beginning Dec. 8 and the commencement of temporary twice weekly charter flights from Busan beginning Dec. 20.

Visitor arrivals from Japan registered 479 in November 2024 compared to 545 visitors in November 2023, a 12% decrease. While the desire to travel abroad is gradually recovering, the strong U.S. dollar and weaker Japanese yen continue to influence travelers to choose non-U.S. or domestic destinations, as well a continuing preference for domestic travel among Japanese travelers.

China arrivals in November 2024 reached 800 compared to 244 arrivals in November 2023, an increase of 228%. Prior to the pandemic, China was the second largest source market of visitors to The Marianas with multiple direct flights a week from five cities. Hong Kong Airlines now flies twice weekly between Hong Kong and Saipan.

In November The Marianas also received 1,145 visitors from Guam, 639 visitors from USA, and a combined 323 visitors from all other markets. ***(PR)***

PEDESTRIAN

From Page 4

vidual was struck by a vehicle whose driver fled the scene, leaving debris scattered near the victim's location. Emergency responders transported the victim to the Commonwealth Health Center, where medical staff pronounced him dead at 12:37am. Unlike social media posts claiming that two individuals were dead, DPS shared that one body was found and the other that resembled a "covered body" was a heap of blankets officers had intended to use.

A family member later identified the deceased, and out of respect for privacy, authorities have opted not to release the victim's name at this time.

Investigators are urging the public to assist in solving this case. "We are calling on anyone who witnessed the incident or has information about the vehicle involved to come forward," the DPS stated. Witnesses may contact the Highway Patrol Division at (670) 664-9085, DPS Headquarters at (670) 664-9001, or the Crime Stoppers Hotline at (670) 234-7272 to provide anonymous tips.

The collision was the second serious auto accident that day with another crash landing a 41-year-old man in the hospital just hours earlier.

As the investigation continues, DPS encourages pedestrians and especially drivers to prioritize safety.

KAFPA

From Page 4

brighter things to come in the near future for our farmers and communities of the CNMI.

The date of the initial launch of the Sabalu Farmers Market will be announced at a later time. However, the DLNR and the KAFPA Inc. encourage the community to be aware of the event and to support our hard-working local farmers. The DLNR and the KAFPA Inc. jointly acknowledge the environmental, economic and collective benefits of local agricultural produce and further encourages everyone in the community, residents and nonresidents alike, to attend the Sabalu Farmers Market and experience these benefits. The participating farmers of the upcoming Sabalu Farmers Market wish to share the resources of their hard-earned labor and services to the general public with hopes that such sustenance can add value to their daily living. ***(PR)***

STAR

From Page 4

"I am writing to bring to your urgent attention the CPA's recent decision to deny Star Marianas Air access to its hangar facilities at the Tinian International Airport. This decision, communicated through a 30-day notice, threatens to halt Star Marianas' operations and has severe implications for the CNMI's transportation network, economy, and connectivity. The timing of the CPA's actions is particularly troubling given the clear and consistent messages from the community about the psychological importance of reliable air transportation to CNMI residents. Air connectivity is not only a lifeline for travel and commerce but also a critical factor in sustaining morale, well-being, and a sense of connectedness across the islands," he said.

Specifically, Star Marianas wants CNMI leaders to intervene and work with CPA to overturn its decision to deny Star hangar access.

"We respectfully request your offices to intervene and work with the CPA to reverse its decision. Specifically, we urge you to advocate for transparency. Encourage the CPA to address Star's legitimate concerns about fee-setting practices and provide the detailed cost accounting required under federal regulations. Support equitable treatment [by] reminding the CPA of its obligations as an airport sponsor to treat all aeronautical users fairly and comply with FAA Grant Assurances. [Lastly] prioritize essential services and recognize the critical role Star Marianas plays in maintaining transportation connectivity and advocate for measures that protect the CNMI's air service infrastructure," said Christian.

In his letter, Christian explains that as the only scheduled airline serving the islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Rota, Star provides critical passenger and cargo services essential to the CNMI's infrastructure.

"The CPA's denial of hangar access will suspend all services. Star Marianas cannot meet Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) maintenance requirements without access to its hangar, resulting in a complete suspension of operations. [It will result in] isolate communities. Residents and businesses in Tinian and Rota will lose essential transportation links, severely impacting their economies and quality of life. [Lastly] it will disrupt the local economy. The loss of air connectivity will affect tourism, trade, and supply chains across the CNMI," he said.

"This action, if carried out, will have a cascading impact on residents' mental health, as they rely on air transportation for family reunification, medical access, and day-to-day travel, all of which contribute significantly to their psychological well-being," Christian adds.

Star Marianas further argues that the CPA's decision appears to stem from Star's withholding of disputed fees, which remains an unresolved issue.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

TAXI

From Page 4

whether or not bail or criminal charges has been modified for the three 15-year-olds.

Adult suspects Jay Billy, 20, and JR Tipingeni, 19 were charged with kidnapping, aggravated assault and battery, disturbing the peace, and robbery.

The duo appeared before Associate Judge Joseph N. Camacho where a preliminary hearing was set for Dec. 23, at 2:30pm for Tipingeni and 10am for Billy, and their arraignments on Dec. 30 at 9am. Until then, the duo was remanded back into the custody of the Department of Corrections.

According to court documents, last week Tuesday, at around 8:35pm, DPS dispatchers received a call from a concerned resident stating a male individual was seriously injured at the Coral Ocean Resort, on the beach side.

At around 8:56 pm, officers arrived at the site meeting with injured male victim and observing the victim's face was seriously swollen on his right eye, left cheek area, his lips were bleeding. Police reported that blood constantly running down his left nostril as well, and there was a visible redness around his neck below his jaw line. The man was transported to the hospital to be treated for his injuries, which included multiple bruising and fractures to his facial and ribs area.

Officers learned from the caller, who was onsite, that the victim had approached him and his family who were gathered at the first pavilion, and asked to call for police. Officers confirmed that the victim's vehicle was at the last pavilion. Inside the vehicle, officers observed what appeared to be small pools of fresh blood splattered around the center console by the shift lever and multiple items scattered along the front passenger seat and floor board.

The victim told officers that he picked up five male individuals nearby the Cool Laundry in Finasisu and the group asked to be dropped off at the Agingan beach side for a party. The male individuals then led the victim toward the last pavilion and once he parked his vehicle—the rear passenger behind him strangled him with his own seatbelt for about 10 minutes. The victim stated that he could not breathe and tried to pull the seatbelt away from his neck to catch his breath but was punched and kicked multiple times on his face and body area. The male individual that was strangling the victim then told him to tell them where his money and cell phones were. The male suspect then slightly released the seatbelt and the victim pleaded with them not kill him. The victim stated that they took his car keys from his pocket, as well as his black-color fanny pack containing about $240, an iPhone 7, an iPhone 15 Pro Max, and a Samsung cell phone. The next day, Dec. 11, 2024, at 1:47pm, police received the victim's IT&E call log history and the victim gave officers the phone number that called him on at 7:46pm the night before, asking for taxi. Due to DPS Sgt. Jenny Sablan having worked on juvenile cases and the victim stating that the male individuals were young, she typed the phone number into her government issued cell phone to verify if she had made. contact with it in the past and confirmed that she had a phone record saved on her phone from a prior case.

The report states that on Thursday, Dec. 12, at around 3:15pm, detectives met with the victim at the Department of Public Safety front desk in Susupe. The man then showed detectives a recent ping location of his cell phone in Koblerville, which was linked to a number. The ping location led detectives to a house along Charakiles Court.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

100 Marines start relocating from Okinawa to Guam

HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS—A small detachment of approximately 100 logistics support Marines from III Marine Expeditionary Force has started to relocate from Okinawa to Guam in line with the Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee ("2+2") on July 28, 2024. Relocations will take place in a phased approach, and no unit headquarters will be moving during this iteration.

Commencement of relocation to Guam signifies the first phase of relocating Marines to locations outside of Japan. The Government of Japan and the United States government will continue to work together to strengthen deterrence and response capabilities of the U.S.-Japan Alliance, while mitigating the impact on local communities, including those in Okinawa.

Forward presence and routine engagement with Allies and partners are essential to the United States' ability to deter attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion and respond to crises in the region, to include providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief when necessary. The Marine Corps is committed to the defense of Japan and meeting operational requirements to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific region. Ultimately, the Marine Corps will maintain a forward presence in the Indo-Pacific through a combination of stationing and rotating Marines in Japan, Guam and Hawaii.

Guam relocation construction projects have been funded by GOJ cash contributions of up to $2.8 billion in fiscal year 2008 dollars. These contributions mainly support infrastructure projects on Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz, Naval Base Guam, and Andersen Air Force Base. The USG will fund any remaining costs while both governments continue to collaborate on the development of Camp Blaz, which will serve as the main installation for Marines stationed in Guam.

Deterrence and response capabilities of the alliance will be strengthened by Marines and the Japan Self Defense Forces conducting joint training in Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands. Training locations include those whose development has been funded by GOJ cash contributions. The USG and GOJ will continue to discuss the possibility of further joint training opportunities. ***(PR)***

GAIN secures $5K grant from Payless Markets Community Foundation's Mini-Kick The Fat Grant

» Grant to support new Her Last Litter Program to promoterResponsible pet ownership

YIGO, Guam—Guam Animals In Need is proud to announce that its SNIP Clinic has been awarded a $5,000 grant from the Payless Markets Community Foundation's Mini-Kick The Fat Grant. The generous funds will be used to launch and support the clinic's new Her Last Litter Program, which aims to provide free spay surgeries for female pets in exchange for their litters, helping to prevent unwanted births and reduce the pet overpopulation crisis on Guam.

The Her Last Litter Program is designed to help families keep their female pets while ensuring they no longer contribute to the overpopulation problem. Pet owners who bring in their female pet's litter will receive a free spay surgery for the mother, ensuring she can stay with her family in a safe, loving home, without having to go through the stress of producing additional litters.

"We are very excited to officially begin offering this program to the community," said Dr. Brenda Smith, veterinarian at GAIN's SNIP Clinic. "GAIN and SNIP offer a variety of different services, but at the end of the day, we always want pets to find, or remain in, a safe home environment with a loving family. The Her Last Litter Program will provide that opportunity to many families while helping to curb the number of unwanted animals on our island."

The funding from Payless Markets will help cover the costs associated with the program, including the necessary medical supplies and other related expenses. The program is a vital step in addressing the pet overpopulation issue in Guam, which continues to impact the shelter and the broader island community.

For more information about the Her Last Litter Program or other services offered by GAIN and SNIP, community members can contact GAIN or SNIP by email at info@guamanimals.org or snip@guamanimals.org. You can also reach us by phone at (671) 653-4246 or (671) 988-9421.

Additionally, GAIN encourages individuals to follow their social media pages for updates and more ways to get involved in supporting animal welfare on Guam.

GAIN is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of animals on Guam. Through its SNIP Clinic, GAIN provides affordable spay and neuter services to help control the island's pet population. GAIN also operates a shelter for animals in need and offers various community outreach programs designed to promote responsible pet ownership.

The Payless Markets Community Foundation is dedicated to supporting local nonprofits and community organizations on Guam. Through initiatives like the Mini-Kick The Fat Grant, the foundation invests in projects that have a positive and lasting impact on the island's residents and communities. ***(PR)***

Commonwealth Utilities Corporation
Board of Directors
3rd Floor, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building
P.O. Box 501220 CK • Saipan, MP 96950-1220
Tel: (670) 664-4282 • Facsimile: (670) 235-5131

NOTICE OF RESCHEDULED REGULAR BOARD MEETING

The following meeting has been rescheduled to Thursday, January 16, 2024, at 9:30 AM.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Pursuant to the Open Government Act (1 CMC §9901 et seq), the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation ("CUC") Board of Directors hereby informs the general public that the Board will hold its Regular Board Meeting on Thursday, December 19, 2024, at 9:30 a.m. The meeting will be held in the CUC Conference Room, Room 17, 3rd Floor, Joeten Dandan Building. The following agenda will be considered, and public attendance is welcome.

AGENDA

I. Preliminary Matters
  A. Call to Order
  B. Roll Call
  C. Adoption of Agenda
  D. Adoption of Minutes
    I. November 25, 2024 Regular Board Meeting
    II. December 12, 2024 Special Board Meeting
  E. Correspondence
II. Management Reports
  A. Executive Director's Report
  B. Chief Financial Officer's Report
  C. Legal Counsel's Report
III. Committee Reports
  A. Personnel Committee
    I. 24-0001-CA
    II. 24-0002-CA
IV. Old Business
  A. Government and CHCC Receivables
  B. Privatization of Power Generation
  C. Renewable Energy Plans
  D. Integrated Resource Plan
  E. Status of the Cost of Service Study
  F. CUC Drug Policy
  G. CUC Classification & Compensation Plan
  H. CUC Travel Policy
  I. Decision on Appeal No. 24-001-BD Pursuant to NMIAC § 50-40-120(b)
V. New Business
  A. CUC Rota Ground Maintenance
VI. Public Comments*
VII. Executive Session**
VIII. Announcement
IX. Adjournment

/s/
JANICE A. TENORIO
Chairwoman

* In accordance with Public Law 8-41, additional agenda items may be added to the above listing only by a recorded vote of the majority members of the governing body.
** All interested persons are welcome to attend and submit written and oral testimony on the above agenda items. Public Comments are limited to 30 minutes and each remark is limited to three minutes.
*** Pursuant to 1 CMC §9912, the CUC Board of Directors may vote to meet at any time in executive session, to consult with the Legal Counsel on matters deemed privileged and confidential.

POSTPONED

COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION
Office of the Executive Director

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
CUC-RFP-25-010
FINANCIAL AND COMPLIANCE AUDIT FOR FISCAL YEAR ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2025, 2026 & 2027

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) requires the services of a U.S. Certified Public Accounting Firm/Individual with knowledge, skill, and experience in auditing (1) financial statements in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles and auditing standards of the U.S. and; (2) federal awards programs in accordance with the Single Audit Act and U.S. Office of Management and Budget requisites

- Provide assistance to the CUC management with the preparation of the annual financial statements in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America
- Ensure that the financial statements and auditor's reports also meet any specific requirements contained in agreements or other contractual requirements relative to financial statement presentation and the audits.
- Submit the draft financial statements and accompanying auditor's reports to CUC management no later than January 31st of each year, and issue the final reports no later than February 28th of each year.
- Provide 15 bound copies of the final financial statements and accompanying auditor's report
- Provide an electronic copy (e.g., .pdf format) of the final report to the CUC.

Auditors are responsible to review the 2025, 2026 & 2027 financial statements to include the physical CUC assets for each fiscal year.

The RFP package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of $100.00 for one RFP package set.

One (1) original and five (5) hard copies, along with an electronic copy of the proposal on a compact disk in PDF format must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked ***"CUC-RFP-25-010, Financial and Compliance Audit for Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 2025, 2026 & 2027"*** to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, no later than **January 10, 2025 at 10:00 AM** (ChST). Submissions, in PDF, must also be emailed to the addresses as noted in the RFP. Late submissions and conditional proposals will not be considered.

Discussions may be conducted with responsible offerors who submit proposals determined to be reasonably susceptible of being selected for award for the purpose of clarification and to ensure full understanding of and responsiveness to solicitation requirements. Offerors shall be accorded fair and equal treatment with respect to any opportunity to discussion and revision of proposals, and such revision may be permitted after submission and prior to award for the purpose of obtaining the best and final offers. During discussions, there will be no disclosure of any information derived from proposals submitted by competing offerors.

All Offeror are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the Offeror due to lack of information or understanding of the proposal requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a proposal or supply under the contract. The RFP does not commit CUC to award a contract, to pay any cost incurred in the preparation of the proposal under this request, or to procure or contract for services. Offeror are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed as per the CUC Procurement Regulations.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from pre-registered prospective proposers and must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) on December 20, 2024** to Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Administrator, via email address manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copy to Betty G. Terlaje, CUC Chief Financial Officer, via email address betty.terlaje@cucgov.org,, Rodolfo Urbano, CUC Chief Accountant via email, rodolfo.urbano@cucgov.org and Marcela Tenorio, via email address, marcela.tenorio@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all proposals for any reason and to waive any defects in said proposal, if in its sole opinion, to do so would be in the best interest of CUC. All proposals shall become the property of CUC.

KEVIN O. WATSON
Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

Opinion

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
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Mark Rabago EDITOR
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com

MEMBER
The Associated Press
Pacific Islands News Association

EDITORIAL

Rivian bailout looks like Biden's Solyndra

It's a lot easier to give a multibillion-dollar loan to a failing company when you're doling out other people's money.

Late last month, the Biden administration announced it would provide a $6 billion loan to Rivian Automotive, an electric vehicle company. The money will help the company build a previously planned Georgia factory. Those plans stalled this year after the company faced financial problems.

Last year, the company sold 37,396 vehicles and lost around $4 billion for its trouble. That works out to a loss of more than $107,000 per vehicle, according to The Wall Street Journal. The company made major capital investments but didn't sell enough vehicles to offset the cost.

In a free market — or what's left of it in the automobile industry—that's the risk investors knowingly accept. If they help fund a successful company, they can make back their money many times over. If they don't, they can lose it all. This profit motive forces them to judiciously determine who is worthy of their capital. This helps ensure money generally goes to the opportunities that best meet consumer demand.

But Rivian isn't operating in a free market. Congressional Democrats have intervened heavily in the automobile industry based on their fear that carbon emissions from gasoline cars drive global warming. In 2023, President Joe Biden said global warming was the "single most existential threat to humanity we have ever faced, including nuclear weapons." Note the disconnect between the left's rhetoric and its opposition to nuclear power and new lithium mines.

Here are a couple of ways progressives have tried to reconfigure the American car market. The inaccurately named Inflation Reduction Act offered a $7,500 tax credit for buyers of EVs and a credit of up to $40,000 for vehicles weighing 14,000 pounds or more.

Yet even that expensive giveaway didn't help Rivian sell enough cars. The Biden administration has done more, however. In March, the EPA imposed emission standards that are so strict they function as a de facto ban on automakers meeting demand for gasoline-powered vehicles.

But consumer interest in EVs is waning. In August, Ford announced that it was shelving its planned fleet of all-electric SUVs and moving to hybrids.

This is why Biden wants to subsidize Rivian. His emission goals require more EV production even if consumers want other options, such as hybrids and gas-powered trucks.

In 2009, the Obama administration doled out a $535 million loan to Solyndra. The solar company later went bankrupt. That handout became shorthand for Obama's green largess.

If only taxpayers had gotten off so cheaply with Biden's Rivian giveaway.

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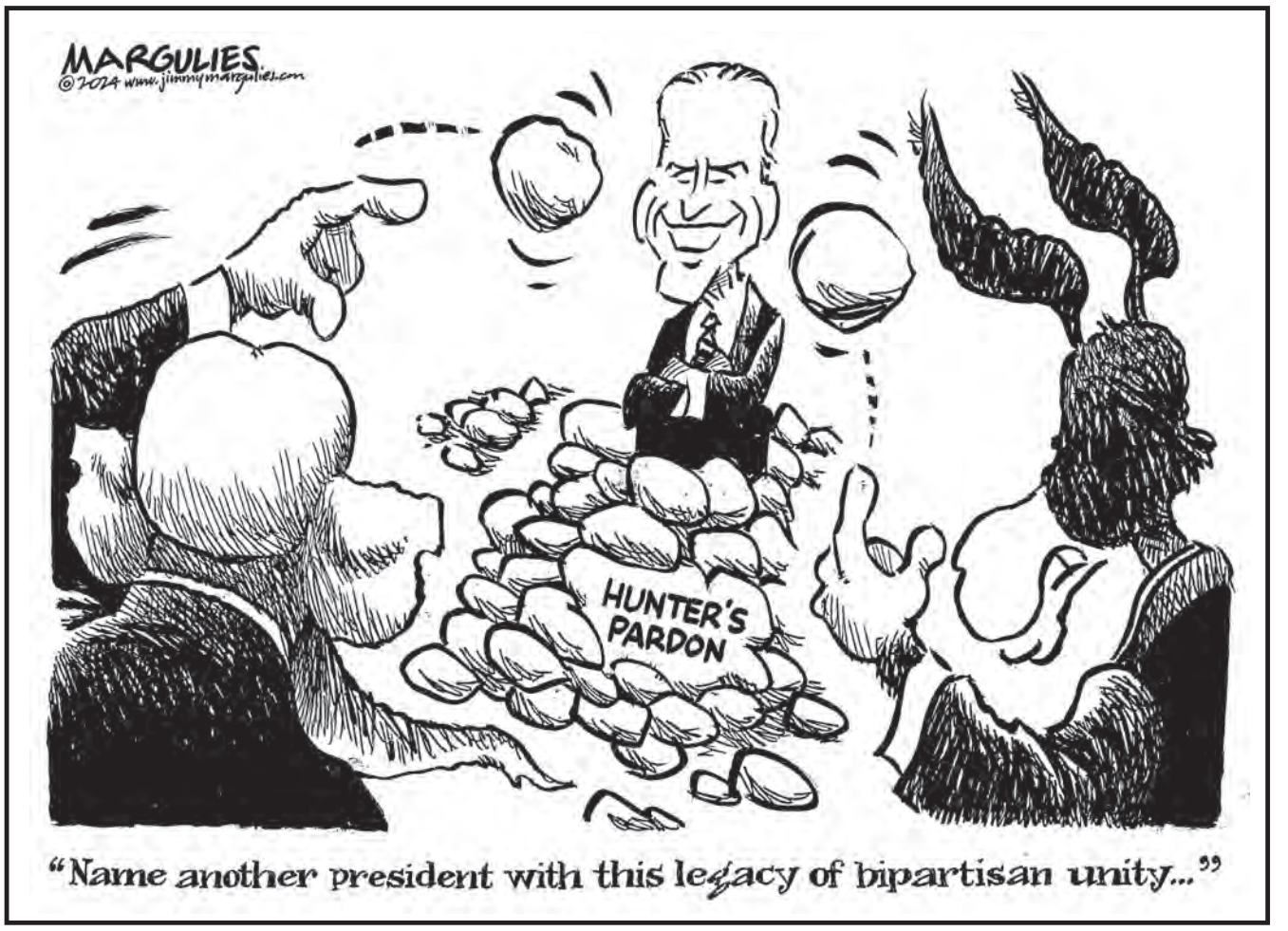


28 miles to the nearest pharmacy? For many, that's the only option

By ADRIANE N. IRWIN
The Fulcrum

Adriana N. Irwin is a clinical associate professor at Oregon State University's College of Pharmacy and a public voices fellow with The OpEd Project. She is also a former president of the Oregon State Pharmacy Association.

Pharmacies in the United States are closing at an alarming rate. The ACT Pharmacy Collaborative, a partnership between community pharmacy networks and academia, reported that 244 pharmacies closed in just the first six weeks of 2024. Similarly, Rite-Aid has closed 500 stores, CVS will close another 300 stores by the end of the year and Walgreens will close 1,200 over the next three years.

In my home state of Oregon, pharmacists are constantly facing untenable scenarios. At a recent hearing, a pharmacist from a rural community testified how a woman from a neighboring town called his pharmacy late in the day needing to urgently fill a prescription. Unfortunately, the only pharmacy in her town had permanently closed, so she was stuck frantically attempting to locate someone who took their insurance and had the medication in stock. His pharmacy had the medication, so while she drove 28 miles on rural roads, the pharmacy stayed open—30 minutes after closing because that's what pharmacists do. We take care of patients.

Afterwards, when the patient had the medication in hand and was counseled on how to use it correctly, the pharmacist checked to see how much was made from the prescription. To his dismay, in the end, the pharmacy was reimbursed $23 below the drug's acquisition price. His pharmacy lost money for taking care of a patient that evening.

Now it might be easy to chalk this up as an isolated incident—an unfortunate anomaly or glitch in our health care system. However, instances like this happen on a regular basis and it has become commonplace to have a prescription reimbursed at an amount that is less than the cost to acquire and dispense the drug. Given the high cost of medications, this may come as a surprise. However, pharmacy benefit managers currently have an outsized influence on the financial health of many community pharmacies.

PBMs are middlemen—often invisible to the patient—that are located at the interface of drug manufacturers, payers and their employer-sponsors, and community pharmacies. They began over 50 years ago as a solution to help payers manage the complexity of prescription drug benefits. PBMs were highly efficient at claims processing, and they do play a role in helping payers process a high volume of relatively small claims. However, over time, the role of PBMs has evolved and expanded to where PBMs are now engaged in negotiating drug prices and determining which medications are covered by a plan's formulary. They also operate their own pharmacies through closely affiliated partners. This gives PBMs considerable influence on how much pharmacies are paid, which drugs are covered and where patients can fill their prescriptions.

Simultaneously, over time, the PBM market has become highly concentrated. A report released by the Federal Trade Commission in July found that in 2023 the three largest PBMs companies processed approximately 80 percent of the prescriptions dispensed by U.S. pharmacies and that percentage rises to 90 percent if expanding to the six largest PBMs. All the major players are now vertically integrated with other parts of the health sector, often resulting in massive conglomerates where PBMs simultaneously play the role of plan, pharmacy and middleman. The FTC report highlights how PBMs impose "confusing, unfair, arbitrary, and harmful" contractual terms that influence the financial health of pharmacies.

PBMs have grown in such a way that it makes it nearly impossible for the average consumer—or even seasoned policy maker—to understand the problems and propose solutions. And when things are confusing, it is easy to become paralyzed and do nothing. However, in this case, doing nothing is simply not an option. Pharmacies are in crisis. The pharmacy from above has since closed, leaving another rural Oregon town with one less access point for patients.

Momentum for federal regulation that will bring more transparency and accountability to how PBMs influence the drug supply chain has built over the last few years. Multiple bills have come out of congressional committees with unanimous bipartisan support. The chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), and high-ranking Republicans have expressed support for PBM reform. Congress has now returned to Washington, creating a final and crucial opportunity to pass PBM reform in 2024. It must be done.

To be sure, as a pharmacist, I care deeply about my profession. However, I care even more deeply about the patients that my profession serves. It saddens me that if PBM reform does not pass, then many more pharmacies will close, and more communities will lose pharmacy access. It saddens me that people residing in those communities might need to hold their breath, cross their fingers and hope they are not the patient needing a pharmacy to stay open past close as they drive those 28 miles.

EDITORIAL POLICY Letters to the editor must include the NAME, VILLAGE ADDRESS, and CONTACT NUMBER of the contributor. Letters that do not have these information will immediately be trashed. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The Saipan Tribune reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

Truth 75: CNMI's forecast, CPA-CEDA and thanks commissioner Torres

By AMBROSE M. BENNETT
Special to the Saipan Tribune

Ambrose M. Bennett is an economist who minored in sociology, political scientist, a retired teacher, and former CNMI Board of Education member, a James Madison Fellow (U.S. constitutional scholar), a Fulbright-Hays and lifetime humanities scholar who resides in Kagman III in the CNMI.

The truth of the matter is with Trump 2.0, the political, economic and social forecast for America and the CNMI is gloomy with all kinds of social, economic, political, and judicial super tornados on the mainland with super typhoons developing here even before Trump takes office. Common sense should tell most of us that if the mainland of America is predicted to experience pure hell under Trump, then it doesn't take a genius to know the CNMI's forecast is going to be suffering double, Hell 2.0, for true! Trump is planning to literally shred our government totally destroying some departments not to mention our foreign policies, Hell 2.0! However, it's not our delegate that we should worry about but the ideology and methodologies of Republicans, as the mainland Republicans are cutting everything including people which spells big trouble for our forecast. The bag full of balutan (free takeouts) we got from our fathers in Washington with Kilili and Democrats may be limited and it may be only one paper plate figuratively, for true. So, buckle your seat elts America and CNMI, its predicted to be a rough flight under Trump just like I predicted in my 2018 book, "The Audacity to Change."

Our new delegate is promising a lot that's an uphill battle but unlike the rift of noncooperation between Republicans and Kilili, our Republican governor and Legislature need to do all they can to be on the same page in helping he—for true! But we should all be concerned the governor has been paying a Republican lobbyist, Fred Radewagen, when Kilili was our delegate and now he raises his salary when we are literally counting pennies. What can this lobbyist do that our delegate can't do, as his $50,000 salary is nothing compared to other lobbyists in Washington who have million-dollar war chests. Who does the governor think he is fooling. We haven't seen this kind of subterfuge since governor Froilan Tenorio, who was paying a lobbyist in opposition to delegate Juan Babauta. What the hell is going on with this lobbyist who obviously not working with our delegate(s) but for the governor, which makes no sense. It's just another waste of our money like the Cannabis Commission! But Trump also spells trouble for the people's RICO prosecution of Ralph's charges. It is clear Trump is going to protect all of his loyalists regardless of the legal merits and moral expectations of our laws and society, so Trump Jr. (Ralph) is celebrating. But God ain't sleeping Ralph, as our BOOST vengeance is God's and coming—for true!

There is a fog forecast for our air travel, as I've seen this movie before with Managah—subterfuge. Why is Marianas Air getting preferential treatment with an offer to pay no taxes for 25 years while CPA is in a big hurry to get rid of Star Marianas after 15 years of proven service when they should be trying to keep and get airlines, as competition breeds quality and cheaper flights for the people. The institutional politics smells at CPA and is stronger since Mr. Ayuyu left. I guess he was too good and doing too right about his job and didn't want to play ugly institutional politics. Maybe he will join the Democrats and do all of us a favor with his obvious skills as governor, just a thought. Anyway, CEDA is also in conflict deciding on Star Marianas' fee complaint and the Qualifying Certificate application of Marianas Air for the people without our consent, as this job is for elected officials, not a semi-autonomous entity. It's subterfuge takeover of the interisland air travel right in our faces pushing Star Marianas out for Marianas Air—GOP poli-tricks. It truly smells with CEDA covering for the Governor out-of-the-blue & in conflict, as I'm sure the stench is going to get worse before it's over!

But I must say a dun ka lu thanks to Department of Corrections Commissioner Anthony Torres for his professionalism in running the prison and his respect to hear what his people want to say about the housing of Guam inmates, as it is a community issue. I will only add my 2 cents for consideration, as I believe it is a great idea, but I think we should not "mix the inmates" but limit our liabilities and just lease Guam the unused juvenile Ffcility and let Guam operate it under the consultation of one CNMI senior official monitoring each shift. Guam will be totally responsible for everything, which is all the liabilities for housing inmates. We get jobs for locals and just collect the lease payments and salary for CNMI officials with virtually no liabilities, make the easy money. Or, we can "exchange leases" so the CNMI can build its own hotel/villa in Guam for our Medical Referral Program—break the rental paradigm. A suggestion to avoid liabilities, but unlike my sad and crying critics—LOL. I'm sure the majority of people, who attend Mass and may not even agree with everything I write, know in their hearts and minds I'm not the enemy but a messenger who is obviously offering hope for a better CNMI and a better quality of life—for all, for true!

I'm a longtime family caregiver. It makes me a better person

By KERRY ANN KNAPP
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Kerry Ann Knapp, a resident of Weymouth, Massachusetts, is an assistant to Weymouth Mayor Bob Hedlund.

Thirty-one years ago, my husband, Bruce, and I took on the role of a lifetime. I became the legal guardian, and Bruce the caregiver, for my nephew Dan Bivins, who was 7 years old at the time and born with Down syndrome. That still stands as one of the luckiest days of my life.

Dan has since come far toward taking care of himself and living a successful, independent life. He holds a part-time job. He is a beloved volunteer in the community. He looks to do good wherever he goes.

How, between then and now, has Dan made so much progress?

If only I could claim it all came easy. Caregiving is one of the hardest, most important jobs in the world. Caregivers are seldom fully prepared, physically, mentally or otherwise, to be caregivers. The demands are 24/7 but can feel like even more.

I'm hardly alone. Some 53 million Americans—more than 1 in 5 of us—serve as caregivers, according to a 2020 study by the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP. No wonder we mark November as National Family Caregivers Month.

I was there in the delivery room with my sister when Danny was born. We've treated Danny ever since as if he were our own son.

On the most basic level, we stay on top of his health and hygiene. We make sure he gets to appointments with doctors and dentists and takes his medications, and we help him eat healthy food, bathe, dress suitably for the weather, and exercise.

For years, we never really thought about ourselves. We constantly ran around to see that we were there for Danny. We worried about meeting all his needs. We focused on how he needed more assistance than any of us, and at times, it would break our hearts. We would get anxious, frustrated, angry and depressed, just like many other caregivers. You can lose yourself as a human being when caring for someone else. Sometimes, we even asked ourselves, "Why are we even doing this?"

But eventually we realized nobody can do this alone. We saw that caregivers like us need care, too. Unless we take care of ourselves, how can we take care of anyone who depends on our caring for them?

So we researched our options and reached out to get a hand. And that's how we teamed up 16 years ago with Careforth, a national organization for caregivers headquartered in Boston. From the get-go, the people there came right out and asked, "What can we do for you and Danny?"

The safety net gives us peace of mind. We can catch a break and regenerate. It's turned out to be a godsend.

Even so, we never ran short on challenges. But early on, we decided how we would raise Danny. We never wanted him to grow up looking at anyone doing something and saying, "I wish I could do that." No. We wanted him to say: "I'm going to try it. And I'm going to do it." He never sees himself as a person with a disability because we never raised him as a person with a disability.

And just look at how much he's accomplished. Danny holds down a job at a local pizza place where every Sunday night, he's designated its "mayor." Nineteen years ago, Danny joined Best Buddies International, a nonprofit organization promoting a global volunteer movement to create inclusion opportunities for one-to-one friendships and work programs. While still in high school, he founded the Best Buddies chapter at Weymouth High School and today still serves as one of its ambassadors.

Around town, too, whether at a parade or a fundraiser, Danny is treated as a VIP. A few years ago, he acted as a greeter at Weymouth Town Hall. Residents would enter the municipal building looking to get a birth certificate or pay a water bill, and Danny would play go-between. He'd say, "Hey, I'm Dan, how can I help you?" Then he'd guide folks toward the offices where a town employee could help.

I've learned so much from Danny. I am who I am today because he is who he is. He's made me a better person. He has taught me and all of our family so many life lessons. He's a blessing and an angel on earth. As I've found out, caregiving is all about connections, the ties caregivers forge with the community and professionals.

So for Thanksgiving, I wish to express my gratitude for all the members of Team Dan—family, friends and professionals alike—because caregiving is a team effort. We're all tag-teaming, particularly me, Bruce, our daughter Madison, and Danny's care manager Lindsay and nurse Jessica.

As I know only too well, caregiving is an issue that goes well beyond my family and me. The U.S. is confronting a caregiver crisis. Caregivers as a whole are overlooked, misunderstood and underappreciated. They need to be educated and coached to gain knowledge and confidence. We have to build a better caregiver ecosystem.

If l have any advice to give to other caregivers, it's this: Nobody can do this alone, nor should anyone try to. We're all too proud to admit caregiving for a loved one is more than we can handle by ourselves. But you should never feel shy or embarrassed about asking for help.

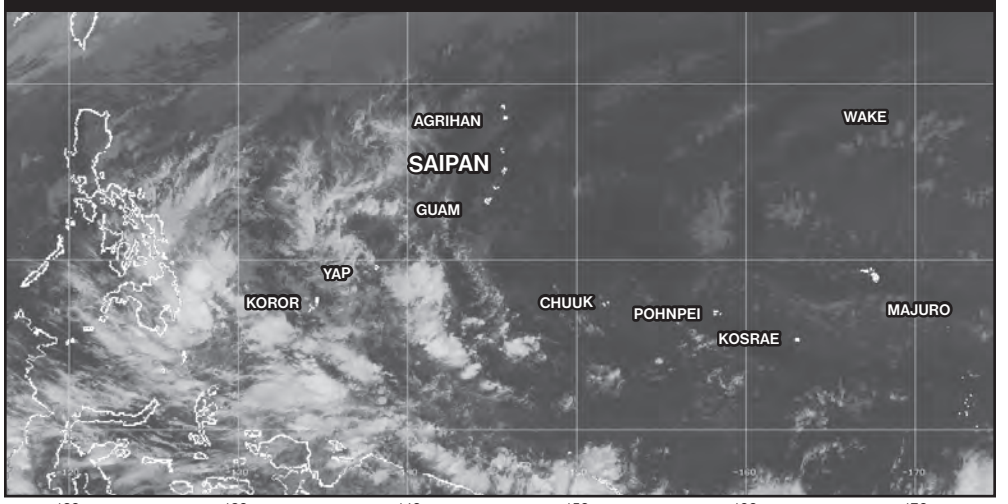
So reach out. Reach out to your community. Reach out to your health care professionals. Only if we reach too far are we ever likely to reach far enough.

The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN

TODAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Partly sunny with isolated showers. East winds 15 to 20 mph.	Partly sunny with scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms. East winds 15 to 20 mph.	Mostly cloudy with a 50 percent chance of showers and a slight chance of thunderstorms.	Mostly cloudy with a 50 percent chance of showers and a slight chance of thunderstorms.	Mostly cloudy with a 50 percent chance of showers and a slight chance of thunderstorms.
86° 77°	86° 77°	86° 77°	86° 77°	86° 77°

YESTERDAY'S SATELLITE IMAGE



PICTURE TIME: 12:05 PM MONDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2024

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Satellite shows patchy showers passing through western waters and another small area of showers approaching Guam this morning. A series of weak troughs within the breezy trade pattern will bring brief periods of scattered showers over the next day or so, before showers increase in the latter half of the week as an increase of tropical moisture shifts north from central Micronesia. The main change was to add scattered showers for tonight and extend the Small Craft Advisory through Wednesday afternoon. A High Risk of Rip Currents is now in effect for east-facing reefs, although surf along north-facing reefs remains elevated from trade swell building through Wednesday, therefore a high surf advisory and high risk of rip currents along north-facing reefs may be necessary.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: https://www.weather.gov/gum/

MICRONESIA		▲ ▼ °F
Guam and Rota	Partly Cloudy	85° / 79°
Palau	Mostly Cloudy	85° / 77°
Yap	Mostly Cloudy	85° / 78°
Chuuk	Sunny	86° / 80°
Pohnpei	Sunny	86° / 78°
Kosrae	Sunny	86° / 78°
Majuro	Sunny	85° / 81°

AROUND THE GLOBE		▲ ▼ °F
Auckland	Partly Cloudy	75° / 64°
Beijing	Sunny	43° / 25°
Hong Kong	Partly Cloudy	72° / 63°
Honolulu	Partly Cloudy	78° / 68°
London	Mostly Cloudy	52° / 46°
Los Angeles	Mostly Sunny	65° / 45°
Manila	Partly Cloudy	84° / 77°
Melbourne	Partly Cloudy	84° / 63°
Miami	Partly Cloudy	80° / 71°
New York	Cloudy	47° / 45°
Osaka	Sunny	54° / 41°
Paris	Cloudy	50° / 45°
Busan	Partly Cloudy	52° / 43°
Rome	Mostly Sunny	57° / 46°
Salem	Showers	67° / 60°
San Francisco	Partly Cloudy	53° / 42°
Seoul	Cloudy	45° / 34°
Tokyo	Mostly Sunny	54° / 37°
Washington, DC	Mostly Cloudy	54° / 48°

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:36 AM	5:50 PM
Wednesday	6:36 AM	5:50 PM
Thursday	6:37 AM	5:50 PM
Friday	6:37 AM	5:51 PM
Saturday	6:38 AM	5:51 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Today	-	8:15 AM	7:39 PM
Wednesday	-	9:08 AM	8:39 PM
Thursday	-	9:54 AM	9:34 PM
Friday	-	10:35 AM	10:26 PM
Saturday	-	11:12 AM	11:14 PM

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY		FEET
2:49 AM	Low Tide	-0.84
10:12 AM	High Tide	1.77
3:27 PM	Low Tide	1.18
7:52 PM	High Tide	1.75

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF DECEMBER 1, 2024

DEPARTURES

SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)

UA076	9:50AM	10:35AM	Daily

SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)

UA824	1:20PM	4:00PM	1, 3, 5

GUAM-MANILA (MNL)

PR 111	5:55AM	7:55AM	Daily
UA183	7:55PM	9:50PM	Daily
UA193	7:55PM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Palau

SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)

7C3218/2305	2:45AM	10:20PM	Daily via Incheon
UA076/183 Guam	9:50AM	9:50PM	Daily via
UA076/193	9:50AM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Guam, Palau

SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)

TW308	2:30AM	6:25AM	Daily
7C3218	2:45AM	6:45AM	Daily from Dec 8
7C3212	4:35PM	8:25PM	Daily

SAIPAN-BUSAN (PUS)

7C3552	3:55AM	7:20AM	3, 6 from Dec 25

SAIPAN-HONG KONG (HKG)

HX77	3:05AM	5:55AM	1, 5

ARRIVALS

GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN

UA174	8:00AM	8:45AM	Daily

NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN

UA825	5:30PM	10:05PM	2, 4, 7

MANILA (MNL)-GUAM

UA156	00:40AM	6:25AM	3, 6
PR110	10:05PM	3:55AM+1	Daily
UA192	10:40PM	6:30AM+1	2, 5 via Palau
UA184	10:55PM	4:40AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7

MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN

UA156	00:40AM	8:45AM	3, 6 via Guam
UA192/174	10:40PM	8:45AM+1	2, 5 via Palau, Guam
UA184/174	10:55PM	8:45AM +1	1, 3, 4, 6,7 via Guam
7C2306/3407	11:20PM	3:30PM+1	Daily

INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN

7C3211	10:10AM	3:30PM	Daily
TW307	8:00PM	1:30AM+1	Daily
7C3217	8:10PM	1:40AM+1	Daily from Dec 8

BUSAN (PUS)-SAIPAN

7C3551	9:25PM	2:50AM+1	2, 5 from Dec 25

HONG KONG (HKG)-SAIPAN

HX76	6:25PM	1:35AM+1	4, 7

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 2, 2024

SAIPAN TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1301	SAIPAN	ROTA	08:30	09:00	Daily
1302	SAIPAN	ROTA	10:30	11:00	Daily
1303	SAIPAN	ROTA	15:30	16:00	Daily

ROTA TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3101	ROTA	SAIPAN	9:30	10:00	Daily
3102	ROTA	SAIPAN	11:30	12:00	Saturday & Sunday
3103	ROTA	SAIPAN	13:30	14:00	Monday To Friday
3104	ROTA	SAIPAN	16:30	17:00	Daily

ROTA TO GUAM

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3401	ROTA	GUAM	11:30	12:00	Monday To Friday

GUAM TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
4301	GUAM	ROTA	12:30	13:00	Monday To Friday

SAIPAN TO TINIAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1201	SAIPAN	TINIAN	7:30	7:45	Daily
1202	SAIPAN	TINIAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
1203	SAIPAN	TINIAN	9:00	9:15	Daily
1204	SAIPAN	TINIAN	10:00	10:15	Daily
1206	SAIPAN	TINIAN	14:00	14:15	Daily
1207	SAIPAN	TINIAN	15:00	15:15	Daily
1208	SAIPAN	TINIAN	16:00	16:15	Daily
1209	SAIPAN	TINIAN	17:00	17:15	Daily

TINIAN TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
2101	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
2102	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:30	8:45	Daily
2103	TINIAN	SAIPAN	9:30	9:45	Daily
2104	TINIAN	SAIPAN	10:30	10:45	Daily
2106	TINIAN	SAIPAN	14:30	14:45	Daily
2107	TINIAN	SAIPAN	15:30	15:45	Daily
2108	TINIAN	SAIPAN	16:30	16:45	Daily
2109	TINIAN	SAIPAN	17:30	17:45	Daily

UOG graduates 217 and confers record number of master's degrees

The University of Guam conferred degrees on Sunday to 217 graduates at its Fanuchånan 2024 Commencement Ceremony in the Calvo Field House. The number includes 116 bachelor's degrees and its highest ever number of master's degrees at 101.

Contributing to the increase in master's degrees is the new Master of Accountancy program, which launched in 2022. The program has now produced a total of 30 graduates, including eight this semester. The Professional Master of Business Administration program, with 18 graduates, and the Master of Arts in Micronesian Studies program, with 12 graduates, are tallying their largest cohorts in the last 10 years. And the Master of Education in Reading program is matching its previous record with 24 graduates this semester.

On the undergraduate side, the largest number of graduates this semester is in the Bachelor of Business Administration program with 25 graduates, followed by psychology and accounting.

UOG president Dr. Anita Borja Enriquez highlighted that UOG's history spans 72 years, and today, four new buildings being constructed on campus are a testament to its continued pursuit to expand the professionals on island in a broad range of fields.

"Our graduates are in high demand," she said. "We have become a major trusted source of high-quality academic programs … to contribute relevant discoveries and solutions … and to advance communities."

Commencement speaker shares journey from Agat to Silicon Valley

Delivering the commencement address was Mount Carmel Catholic School, Notre Dame High School, and San Jose State University alumna Lisa Carbullido Henderson. Henderson grew up in Agat and went on to become a certified public accountant with a more than 35-year career in Silicon Valley as an accomplished tax expert, entrepreneur, and mentor. She remembers attending the Agat library's summer reading program, where she developed the love of reading, books, and knowledge.

"My mother always used to say, 'An education is an open mind.' We learn in so many ways—from the classroom, from our parents and our elders, from friends, from colleagues, from experience, and from falling down and getting up. I often shared with my daughter, if anything, you must get up, dress up, and show up."

Henderson was the first woman to lead the San Jose office of Frank, Rimerman + Co. LLP, where she advised high-net-worth individuals and businesses on complex financial strategies. She has also led innovative companies focused on workforce solutions and professional development and has mentored many young professionals into leadership roles.

She encouraged the graduates to never lose their desire to learn and to always make education part of their arsenal of superpowers as they embark on their professional and personal journeys.

"You now have an incredible superpower," she said. "Apply it in whatever is meaningful to you, your families, your community, your island, your world. Create possibilities, and let your light shine!"

Valedictorian: 'We've seen each other grow in ways we never imagined'

The graduates also heard an inspiring message from class valedictorian Sophie Danielle Vlassenko Santos, a first-generation graduate in her family who earned dual bachelor's degrees in psychology and agriculture and life sciences, with an emphasis in nutrition and food science.

"Looking back on these years, we've seen each other grow in ways we might never have imagined," she said. "From our first days at UOG, uncertain and eager, to this moment, we have faced challenges, celebrated victories, and experienced self-discoveries that connected us with the deepest parts of ourselves."

She reminded her fellow classmates that wherever they find themselves after graduation, it is exactly where they are destined to be. She shared that she originally wanted to leave Guam to attend college at New York University but ultimately made the decision to stay on island. At UOG, she built lifelong relationships with her professors and with classmates who she will ultimately work alongside as dietitians. She said her community at UOG truly felt like her found family.

The livestream from the ceremony is viewable on the University of Guam's Facebook page. Additionally, photos from the ceremony will be available in the coming weeks for download at www.flickr.com/photos/uogtritons/albums. ***(PR)***

UOG

Business administration major Seira Cruz gets ready to walk across the stage at the University of Guam Fanuchånan 2024 Commencement Ceremony on Dec. 15 in the Calvo Field House.

UOG

From left, University of Guam Board of Regents chair Lesley-Anne Leon Guerrero, commencement speaker Lisa Carbullido Henderson, UOG Board of Regents treasurer Mike Naholowaa, and UOG president Dr. Anita Borja Enriquez prior to the Fanuchånan 2024 Commencement Ceremony on Dec. 15 in the Calvo Field House.

UOG

Elementary education major Naomi Jean Blas sends love to her family in the bleachers during the University of Guam Fanuchånan 2024 Commencement Ceremony on Dec. 15 at the Calvo Field House.

UOG

Sophie Santos, the valedictorian for the University of Guam's Class of Fanuchånan 2024, provides words of encouragement for her classmates as they head into a new chapter of their lives.

UOG

UOG president Dr. Anita Borja Enriquez addresses the graduating class of Fanuchånan 2024 on Dec. 15 in the Calvo Field House.

UOG

Lisa Carbullido Henderson delivers the commencement address at the University of Guam Fanuchånan 2024 Commencement Ceremony on Dec. 15 in the Calvo Field House.

UOG

Accounting major Camille Joyce Mendoza Ricafort walks into the Calvo Field House arena at the start of the UOG Fanuchånan 2024 Commencement Ceremony on Dec. 15.

UOG

Health science majors Francesca Dean, left, and Alexandra Lekites, center, and social work major Ally Sablan stand for the presentation of degree candidates from the School of Health.

UOG

From left, Agriculture majors Scott Davis Jr., Risel Uludong, and Aubrie Uson and biology majors Sherald Mae Alvarez and Antoni Badowski stand for the presentation of degree candidates from the College of Natural and Applied Sciences.

UOG

The University of Guam's second cohort of Master of Accountancy graduates: From left, Reggie Borbon, Shennaleen Braiel, Katelyn Cirilo, Rosa Pugay, Isabella Sablan, and Dona Silang. The program has graduated 30 students since its launch in 2022.

UOG

Venaure Kanai, right, and her fellow Master of Science in Clinical Psychology graduates listen to the commencement address on Dec. 15 in the UOG Calvo Field House.

World

ONE WEEK INTO A NEW SYRIA

Rebels aim for normalcy and Syrians vow not to be silent again

AP

Syrian fighters walk to attend a celebratory demonstration following the first Friday prayers since Bashar Assad's ouster, in Damascus' central square, Syria, Friday, Dec. 13, 2024.

DAMASCUS (AP)—At Damascus' international airport, the new head of security—one of the rebels who marched across Syria to the capital—arrived with his team. The few maintenance workers who showed up for work huddled around Maj Hamza al-Ahmed, eager to learn what will happen next.

They quickly unloaded all the complaints they had been too afraid to express during the rule of President Bashar Assad, which now, inconceivably, is over.

They told the bearded fighter they were denied promotions and perks in favor of pro-Assad favorites, and that bosses threatened them with prison for working too slowly. They warned of hardcore Assad supporters among airport staff, ready to return whenever the facility reopens.

As Al-Ahmed tried to reassure them, Osama Najm, an engineer, announced: "This is the first time we talk."

This was the first week of Syria's transformation after Assad's unexpected fall.

Rebels, suddenly in charge, met a population bursting with emotions: excitement at new freedoms; grief over years of repression; and hopes, expectations and worries about the future. Some were overwhelmed to the point of tears.

The transition has been surprisingly smooth. Reports of reprisals, revenge killings and sectarian violence have been minimal. Looting and destruction have been quickly contained, insurgent fighters disciplined. On Saturday, people went about their lives as usual in the capital, Damascus. Only a single van of fighters was seen.

There are a million ways it could go wrong.

The country is broken and isolated after five decades of Assad family rule. Families have been torn apart by war, former prisoners are traumatized by the brutalities they suffered, tens of thousands of detainees remain missing. The economy is wrecked, poverty is widespread, inflation and unemployment are high. Corruption seeps through daily life.

But in this moment of flux, many are ready to feel out the way ahead.

At the airport, al-Ahmed told the staffers: "The new path will have challenges, but that is why we have said Syria is for all and we all have to cooperate."

The rebels have so far said all the right things, Najm said. "But we will not be silent about anything wrong again."

Idlib comes to Damascus

At a torched police station, pictures of Assad were torn down and files destroyed after insurgents entered the city Dec. 8. All Assad-era police and security personnel have vanished.

On Saturday, the building was staffed by 10 men serving in the police force of the rebels' de facto "salvation government," which for years governed the rebel enclave of Idlib in Syria's northwest.

The rebel policemen watch over the station, dealing with reports of petty thefts and street scuffles. One woman complains that her neighbors sabotaged her power supply. A policeman tells her to wait for courts to start operating again.

"It will take a year to solve problems" he mumbled.

The rebels sought to bring order in Damascus by replicating the structure of its governance in Idlib. But there is a problem of scale. One of the policemen estimates the number of rebel police at only around 4,000; half are based in Idlib and the rest are tasked with maintaining security in Damascus and elsewhere. Some experts estimate the insurgents' total fighting force at around 20,000.

Right now, the fighters and the public are learning about each other.

The fighters drive large SUVs and newer models of vehicles that are out of reach for most residents in Damascus, where they cost 10 times as much because of custom duties and bribes. The fighters carry Turkish lira, long forbidden in government-held areas, rather than the plunging Syrian pound.

Most of the bearded fighters hail from conservative, provincial areas. Many are hardline Islamists.

The main insurgent force, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has renounced its al-Qaida past, and its leaders are working to reassure Syria's religious and ethnic communities that the future will be pluralist and tolerant.

But many Syrians remain suspicious. Some fighters sport ribbons with Islamist slogans on their uniforms and not all of them belong to HTS, the most organized group.

"The people we see on the streets, they don't represent us," said Hani Zia, a Damascus resident from the southern city of Daraa, where the 2011 anti-Assad uprising began. He was concerned by reports of attacks on minorities and revenge killings.

"We should be fearful," he said, adding that he worries some insurgents feel superior to other Syrians because of their years of fighting. "With all due respect to those who sacrificed, we all sacrificed."

Still, fear is not prevalent in Damascus, where many insist they will no longer let themselves be oppressed.

Some restaurants have resumed openly serving alcohol, others more discretely to test the mood.

At a sidewalk café in the historic Old City's Christian quarter, men were drinking beer when a fighter patrol passed by. The men turned to each other, uncertain, but the fighters did nothing. When a man waving a gun harassed a liquor store elsewhere in the Old City, the rebel police arrested him, one policeman said.

Salem Hajjo, a theater teacher who participated in the 2011 protests, said he doesn't agree with the rebels' Islamist views, but is impressed at their experience in running their own affairs. And he expects to have a voice in the new Syria.

"We have never been this at ease," he said. "The fear is gone. The rest is up to us."

The fighters make a concerted effort to reassure

On the night after Assad's fall, gunmen roamed the streets, celebrating victory with deafening gunfire. Some security agency buildings were torched. People ransacked the airport's duty free, smashing all the bottles of liquor. The rebels blamed some of this on fleeing government loyalists.

The public stayed indoors, peeking out at the newcomers. Shops shut down.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham moved to impose order, ordering a nighttime curfew for three days. It banned celebratory gunfire and moved fighters to protect properties.

After a day, people began to emerge.

For tens of thousands, their first destination was Assad's prisons, particularly Saydnaya on the capital's outskirts, to search for loved ones who disappeared years ago. Few have found any traces.

It was wrenching but also unifying. Rebels, some of them also searching, mingled with relatives of the missing in the dark halls of prisons that all had feared for years.

During celebrations in the street, gunmen invited children to hop up on their armored vehicles. Insurgents posed for photos with women, some with their hair uncovered. Pro-revolution songs blared from cars. Suddenly shops and walls everywhere are plastered with revolutionary flags and posters of activists killed by Assad's state.

TV stations didn't miss a beat, flipping from praising Assad to playing revolutionary songs. State media aired the flurry of declarations issued by the new insurgent-led transitional government.

The new administration called on people to go back to work and urged Syrian refugees around the world to return to help rebuild. It announced plans to rehabilitate and vet the security forces to prevent the return of "those with blood on their hands." Fighters reassured airport staffers—many of them government loyalists—that their homes won't be attacked, one employee said.

Life & Style

‘Kraven the Hunter’ flops while ‘Moana 2’ tops the box office again

By LINDSEY BAHR
AP FILM WRITER

The Spider-Man spinoff “Kraven the Hunter” got off to a disastrous start in North American theaters this weekend.

The movie starring Aaron Taylor-Johnson earned only $11 million, according to studio estimates Sunday, making it one of the worst openings for a Marvel-adjacent property. Its box office take was even less than the film “Madame Web.”

The weekend’s other major studio release was Warner Bros.’ animated “The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Rohirrim,” which made $4.6 million. Made for about $30 million, the movie is set 183 years before the events of “The Lord of the Rings” films and was fast-tracked to ensure New Line did not lose the rights to Tolkien’s novels. Peter Jackson, Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens have been working on future live-action films for the franchise.

Meanwhile, the top of the charts again belonged to “Moana 2” and “Wicked.”

“Moana” added $26.6 million to its domestic total in its third weekend and $57.2 million internationally, bringing its global tally to $717 million. It’s now the fourth highest grossing film of the year, surpassing “Dune: Part Two.”

“Wicked,” which is in its fourth weekend, brought in another $22.5 million to take second place. The Universal musical has made over $359 million domestically and over $500 million worldwide.

“Gladiator II” also made $7.8 million, bringing its domestic total to $145.9 million in four weeks.

“Kraven the Hunter” is the latest misfire from Sony in its attempt to mine the Spider-Man universe for spin-off franchises without the lucrative web slinger himself. “Kraven” joins “Madame Web” and “Morbius” in franchise additions that fell flat with both audiences and critics. The one exception on this rollercoaster journey has been the “Venom” trilogy, which has made over $1.8 billion worldwide.

AP

This image released by Sony Pictures shows Aaron Taylor Johnson in Columbia Pictures and Marvel’s “Kraven the Hunter.”

The R-rated “Kraven the Hunter” was directed by J.C. Chandor and faced a number of delays, partly due to the Hollywood strikes. It was shot nearly three years ago and originally slated to hit theaters in January 2023. The film cost a reported $110 million to produce and was co-financed by TSG. Internationally, it made $15 million, but its potential for longevity appears limited: It currently carries a 15% “fresh” rating on Rotten Tomatoes and got a C grade on CinemaScore from opening weekend audiences.

“It’s not always a guarantee that you’ll be able to connect with audiences when you have a spinoff character,” said Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for Comscore. “General audiences seem to want to know exactly what they’re getting.”

Several awards contenders opened in limited release over the weekend, including Paramount’s “September 5” about ABC’s coverage of the Munich Olympics hostage crisis. Amazon MGM and Orion’s “Nickel Boys,” based on Colson Whitehead’s Pulitzer-winner about an abusive reform school in Florida, opened in two theaters in New York. It averaged $30,422 per screen and will be expanding to Los Angeles before going nationwide in the coming weeks.

Some big hitters are on the way in the home stretch of the 2024 box office. “Mufasa” and “Sonic the Hedgehog 3” will hit in the coming weeks along with a bevy of arthouse and adult releases like “Babygirl,” “Nosferatu” and “A Complete Unknown.”

The box office has seen a dramatic recovery since June, when it was down nearly 28% from the previous year. The deficit now stands at 4.8%.

Final domestic figures will be released Monday. Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore:

1. “Moana 2,” $26.6 million.
2. “Wicked,” $22.5 million.
3. “Kraven the Hunter,” $11 million.
4. “Gladiator II,” $7.8 million.
5. “Red One,” $4.6 million.
6. “Lord of the Rings: The War of the Rohirrim,” $4.5 million.
7. “Interstellar” (rerelease), $3.3 million.
8. “Pushpa: The Rule—Part 2,” $1.6 million.
9. “The Best Christmas Pageant Ever,” $1.4 million.
10. “Queer,” $790,954.

Jamie Foxx gets stitches after a glass is thrown at him during dinner in Beverly Hills

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. (AP)—Jamie Foxx required stitches after getting hit in the face with a glass while celebrating his birthday at a restaurant in Beverly Hills, California, a representative for the actor told the Los Angeles Times.

It wasn’t immediately clear what prompted the incident Friday night at the celebrity hotspot Mr. Chow.

“Someone from another table threw a glass that hit him in the mouth,” a spokesperson for the actor said in a statement to the newspaper. “He had to get stitches and is recovering. The police were called and the matter is now in law enforcement’s hands.”

AP

Jamie Foxx smiles during an NBA basketball game between the Washington Wizards and Dallas Mavericks in Dallas, Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021

The Beverly Hills Police Department said it responded around 10 p.m. Friday to a reported assault with a deadly weapon and determined it was unfounded.

“Instead, the incident involved a physical altercation between parties,” said a department statement. “The BHPD conducted a preliminary investigation and completed a report documenting the battery. No arrests were made.”

A telephone message seeking details was left Sunday at Mr. Chow.

In an Instagram post Sunday morning, Foxx thanked those who had checked in on him.

Apparently referring to the Mr. Chow incident, he wrote, “The devil is busy … but I’m too blessed to be stressed.”

Foxx, who won an Academy Award for his portrayal of Ray Charles in 2004’s “Ray,” turned 57 on Friday.

Readers suggest supportive approaches for 'Looking Out'

DEAR ABBY: "Looking Out for Mom in Chicago" (Aug. 16) was concerned that 69-year-old Mom wasn't getting out and socializing now that she has moved closer to them, and worried they'll be her only support as she ages. They also said she's always been shy.

As a nearly 70-year-old introvert, I understand how their mom feels. Moving to a new place with no friends isn't exactly a bad thing when you're introverted. I get all the socializing I need when I go to town to shop and talk with familiar clerks.

To force an introvert into situations they aren't familiar with is stressful on the person. It's a terribly uncomfortable situation. People need to realize that there are folks out there who really ARE fine in their own company.

CATHY IN WISCONSIN

DEAR CATHY: Thank you for lending your insight. Other readers who have "been there" also shared their experiences. Read on:

DEAR ABBY: As a social worker who has worked with elders for years, I guarantee that "Looking's" mom will not respond well to, nor comply with, being told she "must" make friends and interact with others. She may be grieving the loss of her friends back home, her previous faith community and more. She may need time to reconcile all of this. If she's active, staying healthy and taking care of herself, let her decide when she's ready to reach out and broaden her circle.

Friendships and social activities can't be forced. They occur organically. Rather than her son and daughter-in-law dictating what she should do, how about sitting down with her and gently exploring how she is adjusting, and how they can help her in a more supportive way?

SILVER-HAIRED IN MASSACHUSETTS

DEAR ABBY: You were on the right track to suggest that "Mom" become a volunteer. Volunteering allows the person to get involved to whatever degree they wish in their areas of interest. I joined a dog therapy group in my hometown. It provides casual, short-term visits in hospitals, rehab centers, nursing homes, school campuses, businesses and manufacturing facilities. The focus of dog therapy is primarily on the person being visited -- but EVERYONE benefits.

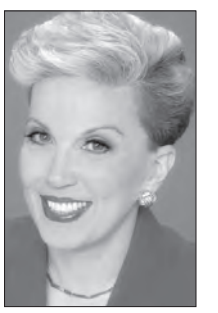
DON IN SOUTH CAROLINA

DEAR ABBY: May I suggest they have Mom's hearing tested? Not being able to hear what is going on discourages people from joining in and getting involved in group settings.

MARGO IN ILLINOIS

DEAR ABBY

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE



Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

DEAR ABBY: You might add, on behalf of Shy Mom, that taking an adult education class or two in the local community, in subjects that interest her, will give her access to potential friends. Better yet, she can be in the class but not required to interact with "strangers" unless she wants to.

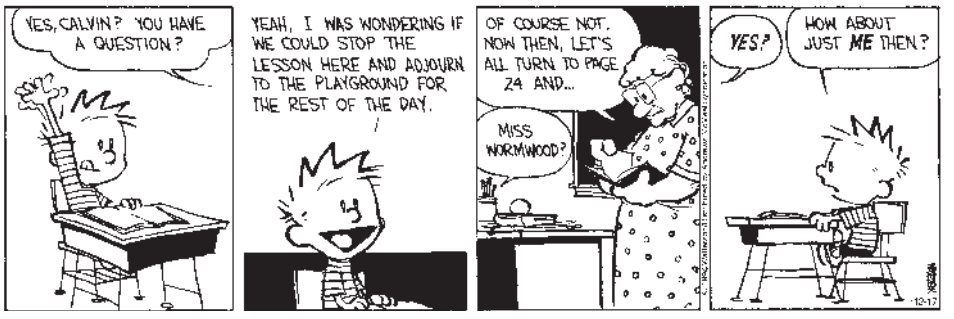
JOHN J. IN CALIFORNIA

Good advice for everyone – teens to seniors – is in "The Anger in All of Us and How to Deal With It." To order, send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for $8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby, Anger Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson


YES, CALVIN? YOU HAVE A QUESTION?
YEAH, I WAS WONDERING IF WE COULD STOP THE LESSON HERE AND ADJOURN TO THE PLAYGROUND FOR THE REST OF THE DAY.
OF COURSE NOT. NOW THEN, LET'S ALL TURN TO PAGE 24 AND...
MISS WORMWOOD?
YES?
HOW ABOUT JUST ME THEN?
12-17

Garfield®

By Jim Davis

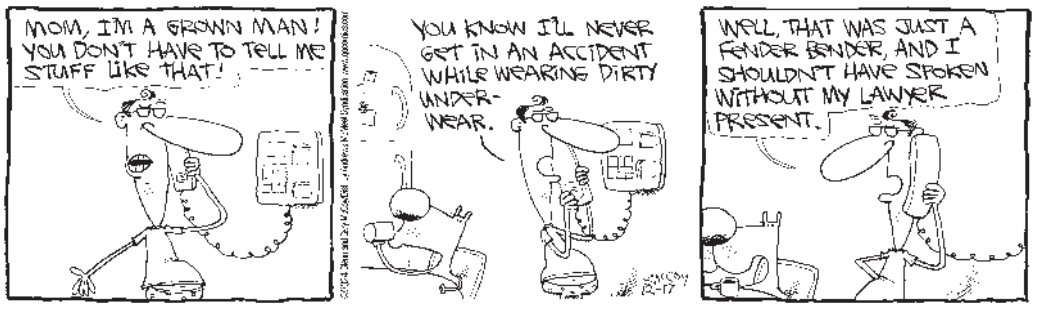
Adam@home

By Bryan Basset

KATY, I KNOW YOU'RE SCORING SANTA POINTS, BUT I DON'T WANT YOU PAINTING THE BASEBOARDS.
WHY NOT?
I'VE SEEN YOUR WORK IN COLORING BOOKS. YOU DON'T STAY IN THE LINES.
I'M AN IMPRESSIONIST.
GOOD FOR YOU. NO PAINT.
12-17

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy


MOM, I'M A GROWN MAN! YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL ME STUFF LIKE THAT!
YOU KNOW I'LL NEVER GET IN AN ACCIDENT WHILE WEARING DIRTY UNDER-WEAR.
WELL, THAT WAS JUST A FENDER BENDER, AND I SHOULDN'T HAVE SPOKEN WITHOUT MY LAWYER PRESENT.

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Vatican VIP
5 Watch chain
8 Dandies
12 Unsightly
13 Bathroom, in London
14 Classic theaters
15 No-cost perk from a publisher
17 Sty cry
18 Nourished
19 Dawn goddess
20 Concepts
21 Gift tag word
22 PC key
23 Some surreal paintings
26 Busybody
30 Fashion's Cassini
31 Scoundrel
32 — Major
33 Redeem one's chips
35 Top of a wave
36 Italian "three"
37 Cave flier
38 Flinch, say
41 Luau bowlful
42 "Adorbs!"
45 Towering
46 Specialized drag racer
48 Birthright barterer
49 Raw rock
50 Formerly
51 Belgrade resident
52 Ballot markings
53 Superbright, as sneaker colors

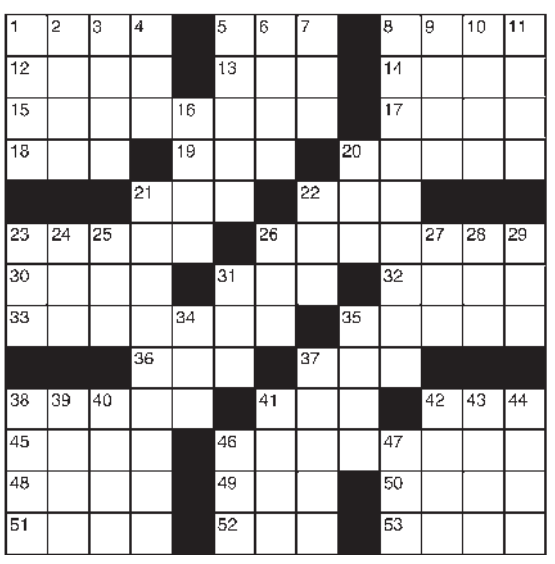
DOWN

1 Magic dragon
2 Monster
3 Begged
4 Storm center
5 Ocean bottom
6 "I dropped the fruitcake!"
7 Lad
8 Mall eatery
9 "Garfield" dog
10 Michael of "The Martian"
11 Fifth Avenue store
16 Corp. kingpins
20 Equal (Pref.)
21 1999 Brad Pitt film
22 Conclusion
23 Physician's nickname
24 — carte
25 French article
26 Posed for a portrait
27 Season opener?
28 Twisty turn
29 Snitch
31 Maestro's signal
34 Scrap
35 First son
37 Dog biscuit shapes
38 GPS suggestions
39 Lighten
40 Winged
41 Chaste
42 Unwanted breakout
43 Texas city
44 Wee songbird
46 Sly one
47 Thither

Solution time: 22 mins.

A	D	O			T	L	C		L	A	B	S
S	E	T	H		O	D	H		I	R	I	S
T	A	T	A		T	Q	E		G	A	Z	E
A	D	O	P	T		M	A	S	H			
			P	I	T		T	I	T	L	E	D
P	R	A	Y	E	R	S		S	H	I	R	E
R	I	G	G		Y	E	S		E	A	S	E
O	D	E	O	N		C	A	B	A	R	E	T
P	E	E	L	E	D		O	E	R			
			U	E	S		E	I	U	D	E	
Z	I	N	C		L	E	I		E	B	O	N
A	M	O	K		H	E	R		D	E	N	Y
G	O	R	Y		I	D	S			R	E	A

Yesterday's answer 12-17



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955!** 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Milla Jovovich, 49; Bill Pullman, 71; Eugene Levy, 78; Ernie Hudson, 79.

Happy Birthday: Take more time to explore the projects that excite you and to venture down paths that offer growth and the chance to offset negatives in your life. Be the one to start the ball rolling. Your happiness is your responsibility, so stop expecting others to fulfill your dreams. Take hold of your future and turn it into your heart's desire. Let charm and enthusiasm help you reach your destination. Your numbers are 9, 14, 22, 29, 34, 38, 42.

ARIES *(March 21-April 19):* What you do to help others will improve your life and bring you in contact with like-minded people who offer insight into something of interest. Socializing, volunteering and spending time with people who make you think will highlight your day. Romance and personal gain are favored. Live, love and laugh. ✪✪✪✪

TAURUS *(April 20-May 20):* Weigh the pros and cons before taking on someone or something that challenges you. Sometimes, the best alternative is to change from the inside out instead of the reverse. If anger gets the better of you, prepare to retreat and rethink your strategy. Before judging others, recognize their situation. ✪✪✪✪

GEMINI *(May 21-June 20):* Change can be invigorating. Consider what works and what doesn't, and adjust your lifestyle, schedule or path to suit your needs. A personal change will work wonders for you regarding attitude, what you do next personally or professionally, and how excessive or prudent you choose to be. ✪✪✪

CANCER *(June 21-July 22):* Do what makes you feel good, and you will make headway. Taking a break from the hustle and bustle that comes with year-end activities and responsibilities will be rejuvenating and give way to a unique new outlook that can help you make better choices and leads to progressive action. ✪✪✪

LEO *(July 23-Aug. 22):* It's okay to get fired up about what's happening in the world around you, but don't let it consume you. Focus on doing something to make a difference. Pay attention to the ones you love and make a point to enjoy and be grateful for what you have. ✪✪✪

VIRGO *(Aug. 23-Sept. 22):* Protect your home, your reputation, your position and your future. Don't sit on the sideline waiting to see what happens. Jump in, size up your situation and change what isn't working for you. The only way to gain ground is to control the outcome. Let your actions speak for you. ✪✪✪

LIBRA *(Sept. 23-Oct. 22):* Cast your fate to the wind and do something you've always wanted. Explore the possibilities, step into situations and challenge yourself to do what makes you feel good about yourself and your future. Socialize and network, and doors will open. Love, romance and personal improvements are favored. ✪✪

SCORPIO *(Oct. 23-Nov. 21):* Stay focused on what you love to do most. Explore and express yourself creatively. Learn from past endeavors and picture the future you want to build for yourself and those you love. Don't let frustration and stress take over when it's up to you to create your future. ✪✪✪✪

SAGITTARIUS *(Nov. 22-Dec. 21):* You can dream all you want, but action is necessary to make a difference or secure a spot that puts your mind at ease and allows you to grow. Use your insight, experience and knowledge to your advantage, and financial gain will follow. Update your appearance and embrace new beginnings. ✪✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN *(Dec. 22-Jan. 19):* Pin down an approximate budget for the remainder of the year and stick to it regardless of the temptations you encounter. A change at home that lowers your overhead will add to your mental and financial well-being. Don't let uncertainty or someone's power of persuasion disrupt your plans.✪✪✪

AQUARIUS *(Jan. 20-Feb. 18):* You'll snap back quickly, so put yourself out there and accomplish your goals. Don't fear criticism or let anyone deter you from pressing forward in a direction that's meaningful to you. Don't look back; satisfy your soul and do what's best for you. ✪✪✪

PISCES *(Feb. 19-March 20):* Take it upon yourself to make arrangements that you find exciting and that tempt you to engage in something unusual or personally satisfying. Reliving the past can help you avoid making the same mistake twice. Discipline will ward off temptation and instill the fortitude to dismiss uncertainty. ✪✪✪✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are enthusiastic, hands-on and charismatic. You are imaginative and opportunistic.

✪: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ✪✪: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ✪✪✪: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ✪✪✪✪: Aim high; start new projects. ✪✪✪✪✪: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

	8	5						4
				2		8		
1				8		9	5	
2	3			7		4		
5				9		7		6
7	9			4	2	3	1	5
	6	2		3	9		4	
4			2					
3	1	9	4	5		6		2

Difficulty: ★★ 12/17

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Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's Answer

2	8	9	4	1	7	6	3	5
7	5	6	9	8	3	1	2	4
4	1	3	6	2	5	7	9	8
1	9	5	7	4	2	3	8	6
3	6	2	1	9	8	4	5	7
8	4	7	5	3	6	9	1	2
5	7	1	2	6	9	8	4	3
6	3	4	8	5	1	2	7	9
9	2	8	3	7	4	5	6	1

Difficulty: ★ 12/16

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WONDERWORD®

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the WONDERWORD.

PETE ROSE (1941-2024) Solution: 13 letters

R	J	E	T	E	P	L	A	Y	H	A	R	D	C	K
E	E	S	S	Y	R	U	T	N	E	C	L	L	A	A
L	R	D	N	E	G	E	L	B	I	G	E	E	R	R
Y	U	E	A	P	L	A	Y	E	R	A	L	E	O	O
T	G	R	S	E	O	U	T	S	G	T	C	H	L	L
I	I	G	E	F	L	R	R	U	S	O	I	C	E	Y
T	F	B	L	D	A	O	E	U	R	O	F	A	W	N
A	G	A	G	O	O	N	H	D	D	L	R	O	W	A
N	N	N	N	K	V	E	S	C	P	V	M	C	E	G
N	I	N	I	M	I	E	F	E	T	L	A	C	G	R
I	K	E	S	L	H	I	N	A	M	A	A	S	A	O
C	T	D	R	Ⓢ	C	L	U	B	S	A	C	T	R	M
N	I	A	Ⓣ	H	B	A	T	T	I	N	G	A	E	L
I	H	Ⓘ	E	E	L	L	A	B	E	S	A	B	V	B
C	Ⓗ	A	M	P	I	O	N	N	A	M	E	S	A	B

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All Century, Average, Banned, Baseball, Baseman, Bats, Batting, Carol, Catch, Champion, Charlie Hustle, Chea, Cincinnati, Clubs, Coach, Fans, Fawn, Figure, Games, Glove, Hit King, Hits, Karolyn, Leader, League, Legend, MLB, Morgan, MVP, Ohio, Outs, Pete Jr., Plate, Player, Play Hard, Records, Reds, Rookie, Rules, Safe, Singles, Tyler, World

Yesterday's Answer: Lubricants

For WONDERWORD apps, books & more, visit Wonderword.com, or call 1-855-232-2367.

Allen throws for 2 TDs, runs for 2 more as Bills snap Lions' streak

DETROIT (AP)—Josh Allen ran for two scores in the first quarter and threw two touchdown passes in the second half, leading the Buffalo Bills to a 48-42 victory Sunday that snapped the Detroit Lions ′ franchise-record 11-game winning streak.

The AFC East-champion Bills (11-3) have won eight of nine, taking advantage of Allen's ability to make plays with his right arm and legs.

Allen was 23 of 34 for a season-high 362 yards with touchdown passes to Khalil Shakir and Ray Davis. The dual-threat quarterback ran 11 times for 68 yards and two scores a week after being the first NFL player to throw and run for three touchdowns in a regular-season game.

He extended a league record by throwing for multiple touchdowns and rushing for more than one score in six straight games.

AP

Buffalo Bills quarterback Josh Allen, foreground, celebrates after scoring against the Detroit Lions during the first half of an NFL football game, Sunday, Dec. 15, 2024, in Detroit.

COMMANDERS 20, SAINTS 19

NEW ORLEANS (AP)—Jayden Daniels threw two first-half touchdown passes to Terry McLaurin, and Washington narrowly held off a rally by Spencer Rattler and the Saints, winning when New Orleans failed on a 2-point conversion with no time left.

Daniels, returning to play in Louisiana a year after winning the Heisman Trophy with LSU, completed 25 of 31 passes for 226 yards. He also ran for 66 yards, highlighted by a first-down scramble on third-and-14 to set up a third-quarter field goal by the recently signed Greg Joseph that put the Commanders (9-5) ahead 17-0.

But Rattler relieved starting quarterback Jake Haener and nearly carried the Saints (5-9) to victory. After Joseph missed a 54-yard field goal with 1:55 to go, Rattler led a 56-yard drive and threw a 1-yard TD pass to Foster Moreau as time expired.

CHIEFS 21, BROWNS 7

CLEVELAND (AP)—Patrick Mahomes threw two touchdown passes before leaving in the fourth quarter with an ankle injury, Xavier Worthy ran for a score Kansas City finally didn't have to sweat out the final minutes with a victory over mistake-prone Cleveland.

Mahomes connected for TDs in the first half with Juju Smith-Schuster and Noah Gray as the Chiefs (13-1) built a 21-0 lead and then slogged their way through an ugly second half.

The defending Super Bowl champions have 10 wins by seven points or less, with six coming on the game's final play.

Mahomes didn't finish the game, leaving in the fourth quarter when he hurt his left ankle while being tackled. Carson Wentz replaced him for the final 5:23. Mahomes finished 19 of 38 for 159 yards.

The Browns (3-11) tried to put up a fight, but had six turnovers. Other than a 62-yard TD run from Jerome Ford, Cleveland had few offensive highlights and too many self-inflicted miscues.

BENGALS 37, TITANS 27

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP)—Joe Burrow threw for 271 yards with three touchdowns for the franchise record with 36 this season and Cincinnati improved their faint playoff hopes by thumping Tennessee in a sloppy game.

The Bengals (6-8) notched the 400th regular-season win in franchise history. They still need to win out to extend their streak of winning seasons to four straight no matter where they wind up in the AFC playoff chase.

They came in without starting defensive tackle Sheldon Rankins and lost end Sam Hubbard to an injured knee after he caught a 2-yard TD pass.

It didn't matter as the Bengals turned six turnovers into 24 straight points capped by Geno Smith's 39-yard pick-6 in the third. The Bengals missed out on more points with a 61-yard fumble return for a TD except Jordan Battle fumbled just before crossing the goal line for a touchback in the third quarter.

The Titans (3-11) benched Will Levis after his NFL-high fourth pick-6 this season and fourth turnover of the game. Mason Rudolph looked ready to lead a rally until he was picked off by Josh Newton.

COWBOYS 30, PANTHERS 14

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP)—Cooper Rush threw for 214 yards and a career-high three touchdown passes, Dallas forced four Bryce Young turnovers and sacked the second-year quarterback six times as the Cowboys defeated the Panthers for their third win in the past four games.

CeeDee Lamb had nine catches for 116 yards, including a 14-yard touchdown reception and Rico Dowdle ran for a career high 149 yards on 25 carries to become the first undrafted running back to surpass 100 yards rushing in three straight games since Houston's Arian Foster.

Young, who had shown improvement in recent weeks, finished 19 of 28 for 219 yards with a career-long 83-yard touchdown toss to rookie Jalen Coker and also ran for a score. But the second-year quarterback fumbled twice and threw two interceptions to fall to 4-21 as an NFL starter.

The Panthers came in as the favorite for the first time in nearly two full years, but it was all Cowboys (6-8) for most of the game.

JETS 32, JAGUARS 25

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP)—Davante Adams caught nine passes from Aaron Rodgers for 198 yards and two touchdowns—all in the second half—and New York rallied to beat Jacksonville to end a four-game skid.

Adams hauled in a 71-yard TD pass with 3:24 remaining and a 41-yarder that set up Breece Hall's 1-yard plunge with 1:05 to play. In between, he made a circus catch along the sideline for a first down.

It was vintage Adams, who became the 12th player in NFL history with 100 receiving touchdowns. And vintage Rodgers, who threw for 289 yards and three scores as the Jets (4-10) topped 30 points for the first time this season. The 41-year-old quarterback also led New York with 45 yards rushing.

Adams' 100th TD grab came on a 1-yard fade route in the third quarter. No. 101 was even more impressive. He streaked down the middle of the field, running past linebacker Devin Lloyd and seeing no safety help from Darnell Savage until it was too late.

Adams was completely uncovered in the flat for the 41-yarder and then tackled at the 1. The Jets probably should have taken a knee from there, forced Jacksonville to use its remaining timeouts and kicked a short field goal to win it. But Hall's plunge gave the Jaguars (3-11) a chance late.

RAVENS 35, GIANTS 14

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. (AP)—Lamar Jackson tied his career high by throwing five touchdown passes in a near-perfect performance that led Baltimore to a victory over New York, sending the Giants and embattled co-owner John Mara to a franchise-record tying ninth straight loss.

Jackson hit Rashod Bateman on scoring passes of 49 and 20 yards after finding tight Mark Andrews on a 13-yarder for the opening score. He also connected with Devontez Walker for a 21-yard TD and running back Justice Hill on a 27-yard catch-and-run that capped a 97-yard drive.

Coming off a bye week, the Ravens (9-5) moved closer to a playoff berth. The Giants (2-12) are winless in eight games at MetLife Stadium, putting more pressure on coach Brian Daboll and general manager Joe Schoen.

TEXANS 20, DOLPHINS 12

HOUSTON (AP)—Nico Collins had two touchdown receptions and Houston's defense forced four turnovers, highlighted by two fourth-quarter interceptions by Derek Stingley, to help lead the Texans to a win over Miami.

It's the second straight victory for the Texans (9-5), who can clinch the AFC South title for a second straight season with a loss by the Colts later Sunday.

Collins had a 6-yard TD reception in the second quarter and his second 6-yard scoring grab made it 20-6 in the third. That score was set up by a 35-yard run by Dare Ogunbowale on a fake punt.

Tua Tagovailoa threw a 7-yard TD pass to Jonnu Smith with about 4½ minutes left in the third quarter, but the kick failed to cut the lead to 20-12.

The Dolphins were driving again with about 10½ minutes left when Stingley hopped in front of Tyreek Hill to grab an interception at the Houston 20.

CARDINALS 30, PATRIOTS 17

GLENDALE, Ariz. (AP)—James Conner ran for 110 yards and two touchdowns, offensive lineman Jonah Williams recovered a fumble for the first score of his NFL career and Arizona used a stellar defensive performance to beat New England.

The win kept the Cardinals (7-7) on the fringe of the playoff hunt and snapped a three-game losing streak.

New England (3-11) has lost four straight.

The 312-pound Williams scored when he fell on a ball that was fumbled into the end zone, giving the Cardinals a 10-0 lead in the first quarter. The right tackle was added to the injury report early Sunday because of an illness, but played anyway.

Chad Ryland added field goals from 49, 35 and 40 yards. Kyler Murray completed 23 of 30 passes for 224 yards, while Trey McBride caught nine passes for 87 yards.

BUCCANEERS 40, CHARGERS 17

INGLEWOOD, Calif. (AP)—Baker Mayfield threw for 288 yards and four touchdown passes, Mike Evans had a season-high 159 receiving yards and two scores and Tampa Bay dominated the second half en route to a victory over Los Angeles.

The NFC South-leading Buccaneers (8-6) trailed 17-10 late in the second quarter before scoring on five straight drives.

Evans had a 57-yard TD catch with 10:23 remaining in the third quarter to give Tampa Bay a 20-17 lead. The veteran wide receiver — who had nine receptions — then hauled in a 35-yard pass late in the quarter to extend the lead to 30-17.

BRONCOS 31, COLTS 13

DENVER (AP)—Linebacker Nik Bonitto foiled a trick play by stepping in front of quarterback Anthony Richardson and hijacking Adonai Mitchell's lateral pass, then racing 50 yards for a touchdown Sunday that sealed Denver's win over Indianapolis.

With five takeaways, the Broncos (9-5) strengthened their grip on an AFC wild-card berth that would end a playoff drought dating to 2016. They began defense of their Super Bowl 50 title that season with a 4-0 start, which was the last time they sat four games above .500.

The Colts (6-8) blew both an early 10-0 lead and a big opportunity to tighten the AFC wild-card race.

A big reason was the tide-turning blunder by running back Jonathan Taylor, who dropped the ball milliseconds before crossing the goal line on what would have been a 41-yard touchdown in the third quarter.

Instead of lining up for the extra point to give the Colts a 20-7 lead, the touchback left the reeling Colts clinging to a six-point edge they would soon relinquish—and in such a big way.

EAGLES 27, STEELERS 13

PHILADELPHIA (AP)—Jalen Hurts threw touchdown passes to A.J. Brown and DeVonta Smith to mute scrutiny of the Eagles' offense, and Philadelphia won its franchise-record 10th straight game over Pittsburgh,

Eagles running back Saquon Barkey's chase of the NFL season rushing record was slowed when he ran for just 65 yards on 19 carries. Barkley, who still leads the NFL with 1,688 yards, took a low hit from Pittsburgh's Minkah Fitzpatrick and missed most of the second quarter.

Hurts also had a rushing touchdown on a tush push for the Eagles (12-2), who were denied a shot a clinching the NFC East when Washington beat New Orleans earlier in the day. AFC North-leading Pittsburgh (10-4) lost for the second time in nine games but clinched a playoff spot thanks to losses by Miami and Indianapolis.

Siakam scores 22, Haliburton has 21 to lead Pacers past Pelicans

INDIANAPOLIS (AP)—Pascal Siakam scored 22 points and Tyrese Haliburton added 21 points and 10 assists to lead the Indiana Pacers past the struggling New Orleans Pelicans 119-104 on Sunday.

Andrew Nembhard had 17 points, and Myles Turner finished with 14 points and four blocks as the Pacers won for the third time in four games.

Brandon Boston scored 20 points to lead five Pelicans players in double figures. Dejounte Murray and Herbert Jones each scored 19 points while Murray had seven rebounds and seven assists.

New Orleans had 18 turnovers and was 10 of 33 from 3-point range in its fourth straight loss. The Pelicans have lost 13 of 14 since mid-November.

AP

New Orleans Pelicans' Herbert Jones, second from left, goes to the basket against Indiana Pacers' Pascal Siakam, left, and Tyrese Haliburton, front right, during the second half of an NBA basketball game, Sunday, Dec. 15, 2024, in Indianapolis.

CELTICS 112, WIZARDS 98

WASHINGTON (AP)—Jayson Tatum had 28 points and 12 rebounds and Boston cruised to a victory over Washington.

Tatum had missed two of Boston's previous four games with a knee issue. He helped the Celtics win their seventh straight over the Wizards and third in Washington this season.

Payton Pritchard added 15 points on five 3-pointers, and Derrick White also had 15 points.

Jordan Poole led Washington with 21 points, and Bilal Coulibaly added 19. The Wizards have lost three in a row and 16 of 17.

KNICKS 100, MAGIC 91

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP)—Jalen Brunson scored 31 points, Karl-Anthony Towns added 22 points and 22 rebounds and New York beat Orlando.

Mikal Bridges had 17 points for the Knicks and Josh Hart added 12 points, five rebounds and five assists.

Moritz Wagner led the Magic with a career-high 32 points in Orlando's first homecourt loss of the season. Rookie Tristan da Silva added a career-high 20 points.

Jalen Suggs had nine points, eight assists and three blocks for Orlando before fouling out with 3:59 left. Suggs shot 4 for 19.

TIMBERWOLVES 106, SPURS 92

SAN ANTONIO (AP)—Anthony Edwards had 26 points and Minnesota rolled past San Antonio.

Nickeil Alexander-Walker added 17 points off the bench for Minnesota, which has won two straight and five of seven.

Victor Wembanyama had 20 points and 12 rebounds for San Antonio. Jeremy Sochan added 17 points and 15 rebounds, and Harrison Barnes scored 17 points.

San Antonio opened the second half on a 20-9 run to trim Minnesota's lead to 61-57. The Timberwolves responded by outscoring the Spurs 30-22 in the final quarter.

San Antonio was unable to muster another comeback after rallying from a 17-point deficit in the fourth quarter to beat Portland on Friday.

Minnesota forced 10 turnovers and had 13 second-chance points to build a 16-point lead in the first half.

SUNS 116, TRAIL BLAZERS 109

PHOENIX (AP)—Devin Booker scored 28 points and Phoenix beat Portland to extend the Trail Blazers' losing streak to six games.

Kevin Durant added 20 points, Tyus Jones had 19, and Royce O'Neale—starting for the injured Bradley Beal—scored 13 points. Jusuf Nurkic had 10 points and 14 rebounds.

Anfernee Simons scored 20 points to lead the Trail Blazers. Jerami Grant and reserve Deni Avdija scored 17 apiece.

A game after the Suns made 22 3-pointers in a victory at Utah, they hit 15 on Sunday. Booker and Grayson Allen each made four to lead Phoenix.

MAVERICKS 143, WARRIORS 133

SAN FRANCISCO (AP)—Luka Doncic had his 80th career triple-double with a season-high 45 points along with 13 assists and 11 rebounds, and Dallas beat Klay Thompson's former Golden State Warriors in a second visit to Chase Center in just more than a month.

Thompson hit two late 3-pointers for seven total and finished with 29 points after the Mavericks lost 120-117 in his emotional return Nov. 12.

His former Splash Brother Stephen Curry had 26 points and 10 assists for Golden State in a game added to the schedule once the teams were eliminated from the NBA Cup. The Warriors lost by a point at Houston on Wednesday.

Dallas opened 14 of 19 to go ahead 39-18 before Draymond Green hit back-to-back 3-pointers. Green had season highs of five 3s and 21 points.

LAKERS 116, GRIZZLIES 110

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Anthony Davis had 40 points and 16 rebounds, LeBron James added 18 points in his return and Los Angeles beat Memphis.

James also had eight rebounds, eight assists and five turnovers in 34 minutes after missing the previous two games because of a left foot injury. He was away from the team most of last week due to personal reasons.

Austin Reaves scored 19 points for Los Angeles. The Lakers never trailed and led by 23 points in the second half.

Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 25 points for Memphis, which had won four in a row. Ja Morant had 20 points, Zach Edey added 13 points and 10 rebounds and Luke Kennard had 12 points.

Story Details

Las Vegas already seems part of the NBA world, which makes expansion decision feel inevitable

LAS VEGAS (AP)—Milwaukee coach Doc Rivers has heard and seen enough. He's convinced there will be an NBA team in Las Vegas.

"Yeah, they're going to get it," Rivers said.

It's no secret that when NBA expansion happens—nobody has revealed exactly when that will be4655—Las Vegas will be at the front of the list of candidate cities to get one of what will probably be two new clubs, pushing the league to 32 franchises. And given the way the NBA Cup and other NBA events have been received, probably nobody would say that coming to the Nevada desert full-time would be a bad idea.

"I think it would be great," said Oklahoma City star Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, whose team will play Milwaukee in the NBA Cup final on Tuesday night. "The Cup is here. Summer League is here. We can feel the basketball culture in Vegas as players when we come. I think it's only a matter of time. The city really embraces basketball, and they deserve it for sure."

LeBron James has said multiple times that he wants to be part of the ownership group when the league expands to Vegas. Commissioner Adam Silver said earlier this year that Las Vegas would "definitely" be a candidate when it's time to discuss expansion, which is believed to be the next major item on the league's to-do list. The city already hosts the league's annual Summer League extravaganza, has been an All-Star host, now has the NBA Cup final four and one of the WNBA's top franchises in the Las Vegas Aces.

Put it this way: In a city where no wager is a sure thing, betting on Vegas to join the NBA would come pretty close.

"Nothing's been set, and we haven't even determined whether to expand yet," Silver said in November, the last time he spoke at a news conference on the expansion topic. "My sense is that if we expanded, we'd do an even number, because then we might have to do some adjustments in the conferences. But I think it makes sense to have two conferences of 16 teams if we were to do it. There have been times in the past in the NBA when we had an odd number, so it's possible. But I think we most likely, if we were to expand, would look to expand to two cities."

Seattle is another city that everybody mentions as a top candidate for expansion. Mexico City could be a serious candidate at some point. Louisville, Kansas City, Nashville and Montreal are believed to have investment groups that want to talk about getting into the league.

Las Vegas, the gambling hub of the U.S., was once essentially off-limits to pro sports leagues. Obviously, that is no longer the case. Vegas has a two-time WNBA title-winning team in the Aces and that league's best player in A'ja Wilson, a Stanley Cup winner in hockey's Vegas Golden Knights, the NFL's Raiders and is expected to have Major League Baseball when the Athletics' relocation is likely to be completed in time for the 2028 season. And with Summer League and the NBA Cup, it already feels like the city is truly part of the NBA.

The city has obvious distractions—glitz, glamour, gambling, nightlife. Those don't get in the way of players handling business when in town for games, Bucks guard Damian Lillard said.

"I'm not 22 or 23 years old. I've been to Vegas many times, and I've had fun in Vegas," Lillard said. "I've been here for Summer League playing. I've been here during Summer League. I've been here for a lot of fights; I'm a big boxing fan. I know what I'm here for this time, and it is not to enjoy Vegas."

Saturday's Cup semifinals—Milwaukee beating Atlanta behind a monster effort from Giannis Antetokounmpo, and Oklahoma City beating Houston in a predictable show of top defenses—even featured a red-carpet entrance much like award shows.

The Raiders sent pretty much their entire defensive line. The Aces had some of their players sitting courtside, getting huge screams from the crowd when introduced. Former NBA players like Oscar Robertson, Blake Griffin, Chandler Parsons, Lou Williams, Joakim Noah, Deron Williams, Rip Hamilton and Gary Payton were all there. And that doesn't even count the likes of Shaquille O'Neal, Charles Barkley and Kenny Smith, all there as part of TNT's broadcast team.

When it happens, when Vegas officially gets a team, it's pretty clear that it'll be popular immediately.

"I love it as a host city," Rivers said. "I mean, this city is a convention, big event city. This is a big event, so it's perfect for this. ... I'm assuming Vegas will be in the NBA someday. Baseball is here, football is here, and everything else is here, right? So, we need to come as well. I think it would be great. I think it will happen."

Hell of the Marianas 2024 a heavenly sight

MVA

Cyclists take off to take on the challenge of Hell of The Marianas century cycle on Saipan, The Marianas in Dec. 7, 2024. The race attracted 160 bikers from 10 countries and territories to take on 4,900 feet of ascents and descents.

It was picture-perfect weather for this year's Hell of the Marianas century cycle last Dec. 7, delivering a heavenly sight for the 160 bikers who signed up for the challenge on the Pacific island of Saipan.

In the professional division 100K, Ryo Inoue of Japan crossed the finish line first and in unison in 3:08:34, shaving nine minutes off last year's winning time. He was followed Michiya Suzuki of Japan (3:04:31) and Rick Nobel of the Netherlands (3:08:24). Topping the women's division on the long course, Miso Kim (3:29:28), of South Korea repeated her winning performance of 2023, followed by Yukako Suzuki of Japan (3:39:44). Jiseon Jang (5:11:11) of South Korea, who finished in 2nd place last year, also made the winners podium again this year in third place.

"It was very hard," said Inoue after his first place finish. "My favorite part was Suicide (Cliff)—climbing, the beautiful scene. Very beautiful! This is my first visit to Saipan, but I love (it). I want to come back next year."

Cerulean skies dotted with soft white clouds framed the 100K course that traversed the Pacific island's most picturesque natural landscapes, all while challenging participants to nearly 5,000 feet of ascents and descents in a race sure to be remembered by participants for both its beauty and pain.

Among the non-pros, topping the men's division were Ryusei Kuragagi (3:32:52) of Japan, Arvin Velasco (3:34:37) of The Marianas, and Dan Aponik (3:45:44) of Guam. For the women, it as Robyn Spaeth (4:28:15) of The Marianas, Kimiko McKagan (4:47:53) of Japan, and Nahyun Kim (5:02:23) of Korea.

In the short course of 50K, finishing first for the men was Hernando Cristobal of the Philippines (1:42:31) and Willy Barbo (1:44:04) edging out Pax Guevarra (1:44:07), both of The Marianas. Finishing first for the women were Heather Brook (1:49:05) of The Marianas and Hyowoon Kim (1:52:18) and Ha Song (1:53:12) of Korea.

Other participating countries and territories were Russia, Ireland, Canada, and USA. The annual race was jointly organized by the MVA and Northern Mariana Islands Cycling Federation.

"Hell of The Marianas is breath-taking, in more ways than one," said MVA managing director Christopher A. Concepcion. "It's been a great opportunity to showcase some of the best nature scenes on Saipan. We were excited to see more of the bikers from prior years returning again this year. Also, we're grateful to our local community for helping to keep participants safe on the road. A great race we can all be proud of."

Started in 2007, Hell of the Marianas challenges participants to a grueling course, including steep climbs and fast descents, making it a true test of endurance and skill. The first part of the course traversed the more populated roadways in the southern half of the island, while the second half took participants along the forested scenic byways and beaches of Windward Rd. and the cultural and historical landscapes of northern Marpi.

Hell of The Marianas was sponsored by Tan Siu Lin Foundation, Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan, United Airlines, Hawaiian Rock Product, Saipan Bike Pro, Seman Law Offices, Latte Built, and Turnkey Solutions. The event was also supported by the Dept. of Public Safety, Div. of Parks & Recreation, Dept. of Public Works, Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services, and numerous other volunteers.

Hell of The Marianas is traditionally held on the first Saturday of December in Saipan, the capitol island in The Marianas accessible via direct flight from Tokyo, Seoul, and other major Asian cities. ***(PR)***

MVA

Ocean, sky, and green hills frame a biker on the course for Hell of The Marianas century cycle on Dec. 7, 2024, on Saipan, The Marianas. The race attracted 160 bikers from 100 countries and territories to take on 4,900 feet of ascents and descents.

MVA

Bikers take on the 100K Hell of The Marianas on Dec. 7, 2024, on Saipan, The Marianas. The race attracted 160 bikers from 100 countries and territories to take on 4,900 feet of ascents and descents.

MVA

The forests of Marpi on Saipan are the last part of the course for Hell of The Marianas century cycle on Dec. 7, 2024, on Saipan, The Marianas. The race is an annual signature event of the Marianas Visitors Authority.

MVA

Cyclists descend from the peak of Suicide Cliff during Hell of The Marianas on Dec. 7, 2024, on Saipan, The Marianas. The race attracted 160 bikers from 100 countries and territories to take on 4,900 feet of ascents and descents

KHAOS

From page 16

All eyes were on "Khaos" and "El Peligro" as they lit up the octagon close to midnight. It didn't end in a knockout, but Sablan won via unanimous decision by the judges.

The 26-year-old, despite being younger and smaller in stature than the more experienced Rangamar, dominated with superior grappling techniques, keeping him pinned on his back for most of the final five minutes of the round.

Rangamar, solidly built and powerful, favored striking attacks to elicit knockdowns but struggled to outmatch the nimble, quick-footed Sablan. Although much of the fight took place on the ground, Rangamar repeatedly tried to wriggle free from Sablan's grip during their scrambles.

However, Sablan eventually executed a body slam that left Rangamar shaken until the final seconds of the match. With this win, Sablan is at a 5-1 record, with a recent win in Trench Tech's Ring of Fire 2 last June.

Sablan, who was born on Saipan but raised in Guam, said after his victory, "I worked so hard for this moment. Me and the boys put in work day in, day out, afternoons, evenings. We train three times a day. We are amateurs, but we train like professionals."

His strategy against Rangamar, he said, was to take him to the ground. "I noticed Derek was a heavy hitter. He throws heavy overhands and he likes to shoot for takedowns. So, my game plan was to initiate him into overhangs and take him to the ground."

On the chance to fight in Saipan's Cage of Fire as the main event, he said, "Man, I love Saipan's energy. I would not mind coming back here every time for all my fights. They cheer for every fighter, whether they're good or not—they put on a show. It's actually the fans that's giving us the energy to perform out there."

The Benavente Striking Academy pupil then dedicated his win to his mom who's battling a serious illness, and his family. "We grew apart, so I want to give them motivation to do something with their life and they could be something out of nothing—just like me."

Results of the rest of the matches will be posted in the next issues of *Saipan Tribune.*

The event sponsors were Miller Lite and Monster Energy, Hafa Adai Rent A Car, Century Hotel and Fökai Industries.

TIDAL

From page 16

offering unique opportunities for our swimmers to improve and excel," said Sikkel. "Despite the obvious challenges we face competing with other sports and activities on island and the lack of facilities, swimmers are resilient, mentally tough and ready to keep putting NMI swimming on the map."

He said that everyone has set either new personal bests, broken a record, or surpassed their target times. "The team came to Budapest to swim fast times and when it came to swimming they were all business, focused, and determined to reach their targets. I am very happy with their performance."

Their performance in this event, said Sikkel, is a testament to the coaching abilities of Hiroyuki Kimura, Christian Villacrusis, David Roberto, and Gary De Guzman. "Day in and day out they are out there giving it their all to give each swimmer no matter their level, the attention they need to improve and become better swimmers."

With what's next for the team, Sikkel said Akimaru is off to college in Japan at the start of 2025, while the three others are still in high school. However, the next big event is the 2025 Pacific Mini Games in Palau.

"NMI swimming is looking to field the maximum number of swimmers (18) for the mini games. Hopefully we can bring some of our college swimmers and also bring our developing swimmers. The idea is to get good results while at the same time provide a platform for our youth swimmers to grow and learn," said Sikkel.

SAIPAN

From page 16

invited all interested in volunteering to kick off the 2025 playing season. The registration for the upcoming season is now open, and they encourage all interested players, coaches, and volunteers to join us in making this a memorable season. The league will feature various age divisions, ensuring that children of all skill levels have the chance to participate and enjoy the game.

"Join us in celebrating the return of the Saipan Little League and support our youth as they take to the field once again. Let's play ball!" said Yumul.

Saipan Little League is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and developing youth baseball in the Northern Mariana Islands. Its mission is to provide a positive and inclusive environment where young athletes can learn the values of teamwork, sportsmanship, and respect through the game of baseball. ***(PR)***

Allen throws for 2 TDs, runs for 2 more as Bills snap Lions' streak.

PAGE 13

Saipan Tribune
Sports

Hell of the Marianas 2024 a heavenly sight.

PAGE 15

Tidal wave of nat'l records, PBs broken

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The youthful four-person NMI swim team rolled in a tidal wave of national records and personal bests during the 2024 World Aquatics Swimming Championships in Budapest, Hungary.

They wrapped up the event last Sunday with a reset of the 200m backstroke national record at 2:34.78 from a strong swim by the youngest of the group, Frances Piper Raho. Earlier in the day, she updated the national record once again in the 100m backstroke with her time of 1:09.52, from her time of 1:09.62 she set last Tuesday.

Also last Sunday, the 4x100m mixed medley relay team composed of all four swimmers including Raho, Kouki Watanabe, Maria Batallones, and Taiyo Akimaru, swam to a new national record with their time of 4:17.06.

Akimaru set the tone for the NMI's record haul for the day with a personal best time of 24.40 seconds in the 50m freestyle.

Then, last Friday, Batallones splashed her way to a new national record in the 200m breaststroke after she clocked in at 2:25.42—minutes shaved off from the old time of 2:53.00.

Raho

Watanabe

Batallones

Akimaru

Watanabe also almost broke the barrier in the 200m breaststroke at 2:23.70, coming in just two seconds shy of the national record.

For 16-year-old Batallones, she said of her record-breaking swim, "I feel happy and proud about breaking the record. During my race I kept in mind all the key factors my coach told me. I had to be sure my kicks were strong, my turns were careful, and I also had to be sure that I was picking up my pace each lap."

She added, "My goal was to break that record and create a big gap from it. I achieved it and I would like to dedicate my win to my coach. This achievement was definitely a team effort, and I wouldn't have done it without the hard work of my coach. I would also like to dedicate my win to Ms. Yuko [Kimura] and my teammates, as they are always there supporting my every step."

For NMI national swimming coach Richard Sikkel, who accompanied the team along with NMI Swimming Federation official John Hirsch, he said, "the 4x100 mixed medley relay was not so much breaking a record as it was setting a new standard for the next relay team to set their sights on. In order to set a good time for the relay we knew Piper had to get the team off to a good start. She did just that by shaving off a little of her previous 100m back[stroke] time. The rest of the team executed their swims perfectly with Taiyo staying under a min on the fly, Kouki swimming a great breaststroke leg and Maria closing out the race with a strong free finish."

With their record-breaking performances, Sikkel said, "The fact that we are breaking national records and are constantly improving means we are on the right track with our swimming program, from our beginners to our elite swimmers. I think NMISF and our clubs have set the goal of improving our programs and

See TIDAL on Page 15

'Khaos' reigns in Cage of Fire main event

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

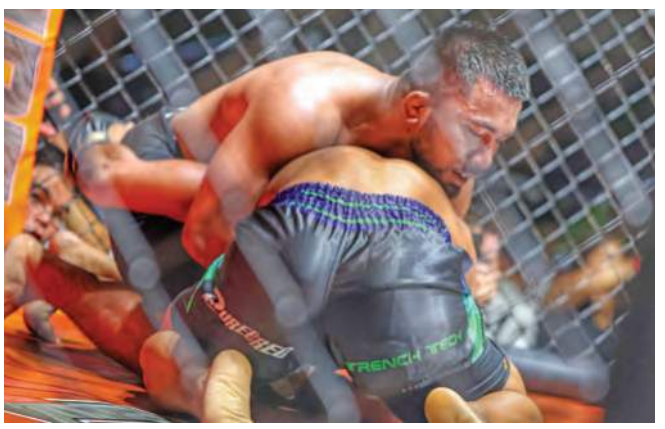
Guam's Keith "Khaos" Sablan set the octagon ablaze with his death grip and lightning-fast movements as he reigned over Saipan's Derick "El Peligro" Rangamar during the Cage of Fire's bantamweight mixed martial arts main event last Saturday at the Garapan Central Park Roundhouse.

It was truly guerra time last Saturday as the fight capped off a day full of adrenaline-pumping, heart-thumping, lung-busting, and exhilarating action across Saipan.

See KHAOS on Page 15

LEIGH GASES

Guam's Keith "Khaos" Sablan lifts Saipan's Derick Rangamar during the final minutes of the Cage of Fire›s bantamweight mixed martial arts main event at the Garapan Central Park Roundhouse on an action-packed Saturday.



LEIGH GASES

Guam's Keith "Khaos" Sablan gets the top leverage during the final minutes of the Cage of Fire's bantamweight mixed martial arts main event at the Garapan Central Park Roundhouse on an action-packed Saturday.

LEIGH GASES

Guam's Keith "Khaos" Sablan grapples with Saipan's Derick Rangamar on the mat during the final minutes of the Cage of Fire's bantamweight mixed martial arts main event at the Garapan Central Park Roundhouse on an action-packed Saturday.

Saipan Little League returns after 5-year hiatus

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

From left, Saipan Little League treasurer Peding Tenorio, vice president Annie Flores, player agent Lina Aguon, president Ray Yumul, secretary Chicha Cabrera, and safety officer Mike "Rock" Guerrero pose for a group photo following elections last Oct. 26.

Saipan Little League is excited to announce its reformation and the return of its baseball season after a five-year hiatus. The last time the league had a season was in 2019, and the community is eagerly anticipating the return of this cherished tradition.

Saipan Little League has been a cornerstone of the community, providing a fun and competitive environment for young athletes to develop their baseball skills and foster a love for the game. The reformation of the league marks a significant moment for families and fans alike, as we look forward to rebuilding and enhancing our youth sports program.

"We are thrilled to bring back the Saipan Little League and provide our youth with the opportunity to engage in a sport that promotes teamwork, discipline, and sportsmanship," said Ray Yumul, president of the Saipan Little League. "By bringing back youth baseball, this organization aims to give our youths a place to develop their skills in the game and we are committed to offering a safe and enjoyable experience for all participants."

Yumul as well as vice president Annie Flores, secretary Chicha Cabrera, treasurer Peding Tenorio, player agent Lina Aguon, and safety officer Mike "Rock" Guerrero were elected during a Saipan Little League last Oct. 26 during its general membership meeting.

Meanwhile, there will be a Saipan Little League board meeting scheduled this Wednesday, Dec, 18, 5:30pm at the Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium conference room and they have invited

See SAIPAN on Page 15